

ESSAY
ON THE
HAPPINESS
OF
THE LIFE TO COME.

THIRD EDITION.

4377. e34.



Version 6-2-80

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ON THE
HAPPINESS
OF
THE LIFE TO COME.

..... What if Earth
Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on Earth is thought!
MILTON.



BATH, PRINTED BY R. CRUTTWELL;
AND SOLD BY
T. CADELL, STRAND, AND C. DILLY, POULTRY, LONDON.

M DCC XCIV.



PREFACE.

THE following Essay is extracted from a French book, entitled, "Essai sur la Félicité de la Vie à venir, par C. L. de Villette." The Translator has selected those parts alone which seemed most calculated to awaken such ideas of the life to come, as it appears to have been the Author's principal aim to produce; and has ventured to make some alterations and additions.

To familiarize the joys of heaven to our imagination, without degrading them by too close a comparison with
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our present pleasures;—to place them in such a point of view, as to warm the heart without dazzling the understanding;—to represent our occupations in the celestial abodes, as holding such affinity with our earthly pursuits, that, in order to be admitted to the privileges of the former, we must observe the strictest rectitude in the objects of the latter;—to direct our views in every event beyond the narrow bounds of time, to a happy eternity, where that which is in part shall be swallowed up in that which is perfect;—these are the views of the Translator, as they evidently were those of the Author.

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It must indeed be acknowledged, that, after all our endeavours to describe the joys of heaven, our mortal understanding can never acquire an adequate idea of that glorious state, in which we shall be partakers of the divine nature, and be conformed to the image of Christ. But nothing surely can so effectually detach us from low pursuits, and unworthy inclinations, or inspire the true Christian with gratitude and moderation in prosperity, with resignation and fortitude in adversity, with humble and ardent piety, universal benevolence, and every virtue becoming a being destined for immortality, and a professor of the
gospel

gospel of Christ, as the habit of reflecting on those superior enjoyments which the soul will experience, when, the veil of mortality being withdrawn, we shall see God "face to face," and partake of that "fulness of joy" which is in his presence for evermore.



INTRODUCTION.

TO prove the superiority of our immortal to our mortal state; to assert that the body will be purified by death from its natural imperfections, and be raised spiritual and perfect, and that the faculties of the soul will acquire a nearer resemblance to that pure spirit from whom they proceed, would be an useless attempt; since to those who examine the words of eternal life, these truths are incontestibly evident. But what the changes will be, which shall then take place in us, is seldom enquired; and they are by many people considered as inconceivable, not only in their degree, but in their nature also.

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That with regard to the former, they far exceed all which we can imagine, is clear from the words of Scripture: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."^a "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be."^b But I apply these passages to their degree alone; and it is the object of the following Essay to prove, that the knowledge we have of the nature of the universe, and of the ways of God, as revealed to us in the gospel, may furnish us with strong reasons to be persuaded, that we shall possess in heaven our present faculties, and enjoy many of our present pleasures,

^a 1 Cor. ii. 9. Isaiah lxiv. 4.

^b 1 John iii. 2. See also 2 Cor. xii. 2.

though

though improved and refined beyond all human conception.

It may be alleged, that an acquaintance with the nature of that happiness, which we hope to enjoy in a future state, is of no importance to us, provided it really merit the most ardent desires of a rational creature; and that a perfect conviction, that he who knows and has power over all, will render us happy, forms a motive more than sufficient to induce us to undertake every thing, to sacrifice every thing, in obedience to his commands. Yet, if he permit us to discover, in some degree, what those rewards are which "he hath prepared for them that love him," our imagination will come in aid of our duty, and we shall meditate with transport on the scenes of future bliss, which in those moments of elevation, when the

heart is lifted up to the Fountain of Happiness, we may in some measure be said to anticipate. But, on the other hand, too distinct a view of the celestial regions would be productive of many evils. It would render this world a state of misery, by the impatience it would raise in us to arrive at that period, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life. Besides, our imagination, being thus forcibly captivated with such an enchanting prospect, must almost deprive us of the freedom of action in our pursuit of virtue. The motives to persevere in the great work of our salvation would be so strongly impressed on our minds, that those painful exertions which constitute our virtue, those trials which prove its constancy, would no longer deserve these titles; and we should derive no merit from actions, the
rewards

rewards of which were set before us in a light too powerful to resist. This would destroy the source of one of our greatest pleasures.

We frequently complain of the difficulties attendant on all our attainments, both mental and corporeal; yet it may be easily proved, that in most cases this pretended cause for complaint ought to be a subject of gratitude. In every situation the Creator has provided for us a satisfaction and joy, resulting from our free agency, and from our own exertions. Even in our most trifling amusements, and yet more in those things on which our happiness principally depends, we could not be deprived of the privilege of deliberating, choosing, and acting with freedom, without losing what is most solid and precious in the benefits bestowed on us. Yet God, through

the greatness of his mercy, has offered to our researches such an insight into the glories of his presence, as to induce us ardently to desire “an inheritance among the saints in light.”

It is evident, from experience, that when we do not neglect our faculties, the knowledge we acquire, the virtuous affections, the happy inclinations, the laudable habits, which we fortify, are far more powerful than the counterpoise of criminal desires; and that our ideas of God, when we are frequently occupied in contemplating him, triumph considerably over all those in which the most fertile imagination can paint the objects of this world. If we have not too often, and too long, lost sight of these august ideas, they restrain the violence of our most impetuous passions, and divert the
current

current of our most dangerous inclinations; 'till, by degrees, they change our whole heart, re-establish all our good dispositions, and plant virtue in all those secret recesses where vice had flourished before.

If it be true, that from our entrance into the world, from the commencement of our discipline, every thing points out to us the way of true felicity, and that, if at the first step we take the right path, every thing engages and encourages us more and more to pursue it; it is true also, (and it is a very remarkable and a very consoling observation) that God, infinitely wise and good, has hazarded our happiness no farther than was necessary to preserve our free-agency, the soul of all enjoyment.

It follows then, that, thus supported by a sure and certain hope, we may be enabled

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to *endure* with patience *unto the end* all those trials of mortality which shall be succeeded by eternal happiness.^c Let us suppose all the evils we can suffer to be collected over us, those at least which we do not bring upon ourselves, they would occupy only a very small part of our life; they do not arrive altogether; they are blended with many comforts; they may be constantly alleviated by the pleasure of self-approbation, by the sentiment of an affectionate obedience, of an humble resignation, to the will of that adorable Being whom we love with our whole soul; and they are almost absorbed in that faith, which is as an anticipated possession of “things hoped for.”^d

St. Peter lays it down as an evident fact, that a faithful christian is also joyful. He

^c Matth. xxiv. 13; and xxv. 46. Rom. ii. 7. ^d Heb. xi. 1.
does

does not say to those to whom he addresses his epistle,—In believing on the Son of God I beseech you rejoice,—but, Ye do “re-
“joice with joy unspeakable;” and it ought to be remarked, that at the time in which St. Peter wrote to them in this manner, they were threatened with various evils, from the absolute power of the Gentiles, and the implacable fury of the Jews.

In the moments of attentive meditation, a christian cannot be insensible to the mercies of God in his beloved Son; and if he has not one of those extraordinary dispositions which nothing can move, he must be strongly affected by them. If we could constantly preserve this happy state of mind, we should be in the most desirable situation to which we could aspire here below; but this is not

* 1 Pet. i. 8.

the case: the christian, so lately penetrated with celestial joy, again becomes a feeble mortal, who mourns and rejoices for trifles. In spite of the resistance of the understanding, in spite of the ascendancy of the sublimest sentiments, the mechanism of our body, its unforeseen disorders, produce unhappy variations, which an overstrained severity regards as incompatible with zealous piety and solid virtue. Yet these humiliating inconsistencies will not prove that we do not love our heavenly Father and merciful Redeemer, that we do not trust and rejoice in him; but these glorious sentiments require to be frequently awakened, extended, and more firmly established.

Our natural eagerness after present pleasures, which so often leads us into folly, forms on this occasion a motive to employ
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all our cares, all our efforts, to perfect this important work. The tranquillity, the state of peace and contentment, which I have just mentioned, is an immediate actual blessing, and it is an inestimable one; it adds a charm to all our innocent pleasures, which infinitely surpasses their intrinsic value. Without that tranquillity, founded on an immovable basis; without that permanent satisfaction which has its source in our own bosom, and depends on no exterior object; all which the world calls pleasure is generally accompanied by reproaches, regrets, and afflictions; while this happy state of mind can convert the most insignificant recreation, the most trifling amusement, into a real, a considerable blessing.

The most insipid day of the man who rejoices in God, is infinitely preferable to the
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most brilliant, the most fortunate day, of the ambitious or the voluptuous. But behold this man blessed from above; behold him either in “the courts of the Lord,”^f or in a chosen retreat, where, abstracting his thoughts from all terrestrial objects, and inviting those which constitute the treasure of his heart to appear before his soul, he fills it with celestial joy; then you will exclaim with him, and with the Psalmist, “O Lord! “a day in thy courts is better than a thousand”^g elsewhere: then you will not be surprised at David’s ardent spiritual thirst after God,^h at the unutterable aspirations of St. Paul,ⁱ at the *unspeakable joy* of St. Peter,^k at “that peace which passeth all understanding:”^l expressions which many regard

^f Psa. lxxxiv. 2.

^g Psa. lxxxiv. 10.

^h Psa. xliiii. 2.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 23.

^k 1 Pet. i. 8.

^l Phil. iv. 7.

either

either as poetically figurative, or as extravagancies proceeding from the warmth of an eastern imagination. It is true that the degree of this joy depends greatly upon the constitution, and upon the force and delicacy of certain faculties or qualities of the mind; consequently those who are susceptible of strong and lively emotions, would do wrong to judge from their own feelings of the reality, the sincerity, the constancy, or the piety of others; but those who cannot feel these emotions, ought not to consider as error or weakness, a sensibility so noble and so enviable.

Every one may, if I do not deceive myself, regard as moral truths the following propositions:

First; If that joy with which we are inspired by our love of God, and of his Son

JESUS

JESUS CHRIST, is not with the generality of christians absolutely an *unspeakable joy*; at least it is sometimes ardent, and it almost constantly produces a state of peace, of confidence, of content, to which no situation merely worldly or terrestrial can approach. Sometimes indeed it may be suspended in the confusion of business, absorbed in the anguish of affliction, or banished for some moments by the petulant impatience of a quick and warm temper; but it soon regains its ascendancy, and re-establishes a cheerful tranquillity. Where these effects do not appear, that christian disposition does not exist; and those who do not possess it, and yet believe that they are christians, deceive themselves, and take for real piety what has only the appearance of it; or those passions, “ which
“ war

“war against the soul,”^m obtain frequent victories over their feeble virtue, and they abandon themselves to foolish projects and hurtful desires. In this case, assuredly they cannot expect to feel that celestial joy; and the same principles which ought to produce and nourish it, will cause in its place a dejection and terror, which even incredulity itself does not always experience. I do not mean to include those, who, with the sincerest piety, and the best dispositions, are afflicted with doubts and distractions. These are frequently owing to some corporeal disorder, which oppresses the faculties of the mind, and disturbs its tranquillity. Sometimes indeed the cause is unknown to us; but we may trust to that merciful Saviour, who has said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour,

^m 1 Pet. ii. 11.

“and

“and are heavy laden, and I will give you
 “rest.”^a Those doubts which afflict us here,
 will be removed in a future state; though
 “now we know but in part, then shall we
 “know even as we are known.”^o “God
 “shall wipe away all tears from our eyes,
 “and there shall be no more sorrow.”^p

Secondly; If we would assure ourselves
 that our joy is solid, that it is adequate to
 the greatness of its cause, that it expresses
 how strongly we are affected by that faith
 which we profess to be planted in our hearts;
 how deeply we are penetrated with admira-
 tion, love, gratitude, confidence, and hope;
 let us beware of trusting to transient emo-
 tions: they may be deceitful. We can only
 judge of this joy from its ordinary and con-
 stant effects. The christian in whom it

^a Matth. xi. 28.

^o 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^p Rev. xxi. 4.

stant effects. The christian in whom it dwells knows nothing, I do not only say which can equal it, but which can bear a comparison with it. He therefore makes a firm resolution to banish immediately all joy, with which this is inconsistent. He knows that it has its source, not in a fruitless contemplation of the favours of the Most High, and of his great designs for the happiness of the human race, but in an active admiration, a gratitude fruitful in good works, a pure taste for, and a firm attachment to, every thing laudable, honourable, just, and amiable; in short, in employing his cares and exertions to cultivate and strengthen in himself all those noble principles of virtue which God has formed within him, and all the salutary knowledge which he has afforded him. When the least danger threatens his

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conscience,

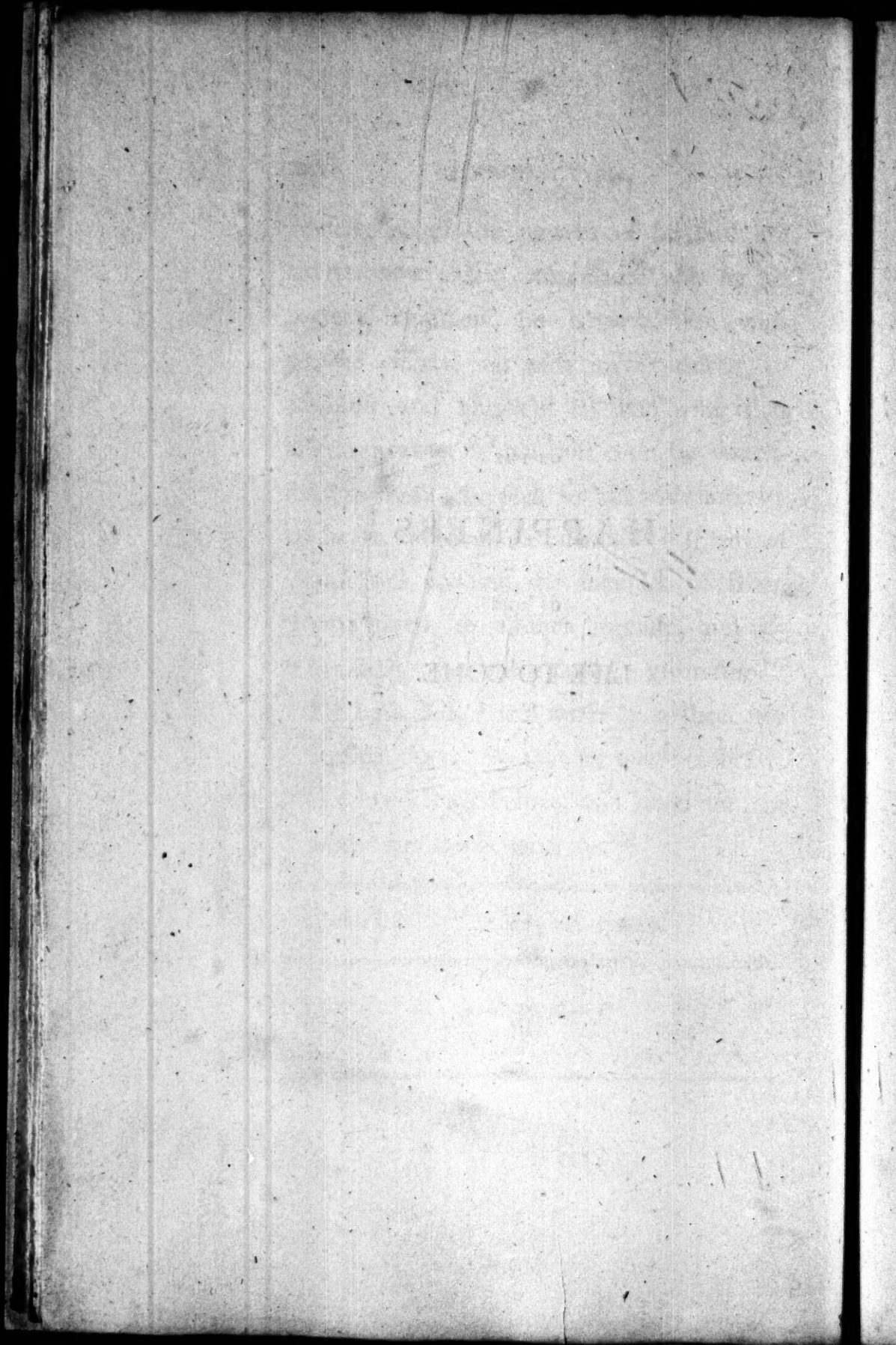
conscience, all the powers of his soul are exerted to avoid it. Animated also by his present happiness, he labours, not with painful efforts, but with joyful ardour, to establish and augment it; imploring that assisting grace, which will ever be vouchsafed to those who seek its aid with sincerity of heart and pious confidence. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man doeth unto me.”

* James i. 5.

* Heb. xiii. 5 and 6.



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PART I.

IN a comparative view of our present and future state of existence, my observations will be chiefly comprised under two heads: Knowledge and Sentiment: the first relative to the powers of the understanding, the second to the affections of the heart. I shall first enlarge on the imperfections of these faculties, and of the pleasures which we derive from them in this life; and then endeavour to explain what their improvements will probably

probably be in that which is to come. I begin with the powers of the understanding.

The positive evils which attend our progress through this state of trial are sensibly felt by every human being. Pain and sickness, sorrow and disappointment, are at times the lot of all; but there are sufferings of a different kind, of which the most cultivated minds are most susceptible, as they are perceived and felt in proportion to the delicacy of our taste, and the improvement of our mental powers.

We may place in the rank of intellectual evils the natural imperfection of our faculties. Our understanding and memory are weak, and various inevitable impediments prevent us from employing these talents to the utmost. Established errors, instructors who teach ill, or (if we are reduced to proceed

ceed without a guide) the want of proper means to inform ourselves; various circumstances of life, which prevent us from attaining those acquirements for which we have the greatest inclination; in a word, innumerable accidents, and unfavourable events, either turn us aside from the truth, or permit us to discern it only through an obscure and perplexing medium.

If we should be surpris'd that there are so few people in the world who make a progress in elegant and useful knowledge, let us only consider how rare is the advantage of an uninterrupted and regular meditation, how many necessities or disorders derange or retard our researches.

Various are the impediments by which we frequently find ourselves stop'd in the career of the most sublime and interesting studies.

studies. The desire of knowledge is universal; and yet whole nations, almost all the nations of the world, shamefully enslaved by prejudice, and proud of their infatuation, persist with an invincible obstinacy in a dark and intricate path, and frequently only advance further into error; or, perhaps, satisfied with the labours of their predecessors, and abandoning themselves to an unmanly indolence, they enquire no further: they know already all which they desire to know. Not content with indulging this unworthy inactivity, they oppose the exertions of those noble individuals, who, animated by an ardent love of truth, dare to shake off such dishonourable and dangerous fetters, and endeavour to deliver others from them.

We may rank amongst mental evils those which, from the natural influence of the
body

body upon the mind, are occasioned by corporeal disorders. Pain and sickness not only frequently betray us into a restlessness and impatience of spirit, which it requires the strictest watch over ourselves to avoid, but often, by deranging those finer parts which more immediately act upon the mental powers, produce the most deplorable effects, and degrade the faculties of the immortal soul almost to a level with the instinct of the beasts that perish. To this we may add, that dejection of mind, that pensive sadness, the cause of which cannot be discovered either in the soul itself, or in any external event; and which, therefore, can be supposed to proceed only from some corporeal derangement, which, without this grievous effect, would have remained imperceptible. We frequently see, and even more frequently than

than elsewhere, in these happy climates, where liberty and enlightened reason eminently prevail, persons of an excellent understanding, perfectly regular in their manners, rich in advantages both of nature and fortune, fall into a deep melancholy, which they pronounce to be insurmountable. Nothing gives them pleasure: every thing wearies them. But are we very certain that no afflictive event has befallen them? Yes, they themselves confess it. Every thing around smiles upon them as before. It must be, therefore, an insensible corporeal disorder which thus affects their intellectual faculties. “The corruptible body presseth
“down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle
“weigheth down the mind that museth upon
“many things. And hardly do we guess
“aright at things that are upon earth; and
“with

“with labour do we find the things that
“are before us: but the things that are in
“heaven who hath searched out?”¹

Particular circumstances vary infinitely the evils of the mind. It is very seldom that our business, our profession, our way of life, the persons with whom we are acquainted, the country which we inhabit, the fortune, the employment, the rank which we possess, answer to our inclinations and ideas. One man, whose destiny confines him in a country almost desert, envies the happiness which the citizen of a capital enjoys: whilst the same citizen, overpowered with business, and tormented with cares, wishes for the peaceable retreat of the inhabitant of the country.

But our greatest evils are caused by our passions. If we yield to them in the smallest

¹ Wisdom ix. 15, 16.

degree,

degree, they become to the soul what violent paroxysms are to the body; and, however nobly we may subdue them, there is at least a time in which they make us suffer,—the time of combat.

Our desires and aversions, with regard to all kinds of advantages or evils, real or imaginary, are the sources of innumerable vexations and afflictions. They are often attended with alarms and fears, with regard both to the present life and to that which is to come. We fear for our possessions, reputation, health, and life; we place our desires on improper objects, and these desires torment us; we love what does not deserve our regard, and sooner or later we find reason to be ashamed of it; we regret excessively an object which could but very imperfectly contribute to our happiness; we fear that which
may

may never happen, we hope for that which can scarcely ever happen. Ideas which strike the imagination, cause torments as real, and sometimes much more severe than the evil which we thus represent to ourselves would be in itself; and we are punished for encouraging extravagant hopes, by the disappointments which follow them. Add to these, dissensions, quarrels, jealousies, afflictions of every kind, which often, in this corrupt world, neither prudence nor probity can prevent; and lastly, the evils of conscience, infinitely more terrible than all the rest.

The noblest sentiments of our heart must frequently be productive of mental evils. The interest we take in the welfare of others occasions anxiety; the loss of those comforts which reason and affection concur to render precious, deeply wounds our sensibility; and thus,

thus, the most moderate, cautious, and virtuous men, are exposed to numerous painful emotions.

Affuredly the spiritual part of our felicity (permit me to call it the health and ease of the soul) depends upon a much greater variety of circumstances, than the ease and health of the body, and its secret springs are much more delicate. In a long life, there are weeks, months, and sometimes years, which are not distinguished by any corporeal disorder; instead of which, few days pass over our heads unmarked by some mental pain or uneasiness. We may then venture to assert, that the evils of the mind are far more numerous, more various, and often much less supportable, than those of the body; and in considering them together, what could we think of the designs of the
Creator,

Creator, if our existence terminated with the present life?

But when “this corruptible shall have
“put on incorruption, when this mortal shall
“have put on immortality,”^x we shall be
freed from all infirmities. Sickness and pain
shall no more disturb our most useful occu-
pations, our most innocent pleasures. Our
senses, being perfected to a degree of which
we can at present form no idea, will convey
to the soul an endless variety of delightful
impressions. In the enjoyment of eternal
youth and health, with our faculties and
tastes in a state of continual improvement,
our pleasures and our virtues will be con-
tinually increasing. Our pursuit of know-
ledge will no longer be attended with weari-
ness or disgust; our virtues will no more be

^x 1 Cor. xv. 53.

mixed with imperfection, nor our pleasures end in grief and disappointment. I intend to consider our comparative situation in this world and the next with a view to all these sources of enjoyment.

The pleasures most suitable to an intelligent creature, those which distinguish him from the brute, and form the essential part of his felicity, are the active pleasures: I mean those which he derives from the voluntary use of his faculties. What is it to be acquainted with an object? Assuredly it is not merely to have that idea of it which is impressed upon the soul by means of the senses, for in that case the knowledge of the brute would not be inferior to our own: it is when we reflect on the impression received, that we begin to *know*; that we free ourselves from the vile state of passive creatures, and
rise

rise to the honourable class of active beings: it is then, and then only, that the soul, enjoying the consciousness of its own dignity, finds in its actions a satisfaction, a variety of pleasure, which no sensation, no impression, merely as such, could possibly afford it. To reflect, to examine, is to will, to act freely; consequently the pleasure of acquiring and possessing knowledge is an intellectual, an active pleasure; calculated for a being endued with reason, and glorying in free-agency. A state of mental repose is not consistent with the nature of a created intelligent being. We have no sooner attained to one degree of knowledge, than we aspire to the next. If we should find our progress suddenly limited by eternal barriers, our desires would continually torment us. We cannot enough admire the extent,

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the delicacy, of those arrangements which God has made for our felicity. Our faculties unfold, and our acquirements increase more and more. In comparison with the impetuosity of our desires, we seem to advance but slowly, yet still we do advance. This impetuosity is rendered excusable here below, by the shortness of our life, the uncertainty of every thing human, and our own weakness. It is frequently necessary to facilitate our progress in various occupations and studies; yet it is generally attended with some degree of uneasiness, as it induces us to aspire after the attainment of perfections, before we can arrive at them by a natural progression, and consequently occasions us many mortifications.

But such is the importance of acquiring and possessing knowledge, that the wise and benevolent

benevolent Creator impels us, almost irresistibly, to employ all our faculties in the pursuit of it. He has not only furnished us with the motive, which is produced by the idea of extensive utility annexed to such pursuits, (an idea which presents itself at first, and which opens and extends in proportion to our progress) but lest this motive should not be effectual, or should begin too late to operate on imperfect and mortal beings, he has given us a spring of action, influencing us continually from our earliest infancy; and this is curiosity.

The human understanding, expressly calculated to acquire knowledge, and introduced into the world destitute of it, no sooner exists than it exerts itself to learn. This natural curiosity is the first spring of all the efforts we make to inform ourselves. It

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is so powerful, that, if destitute of objects worthy of its attention, it will employ itself upon trifles. Our understanding cannot remain inactive; that state is insupportable to it. To this it is owing, that when we have not early learnt to love those truths which are of some importance, we contract the despicable habit of sending our intellectual powers in quest of a thousand trifles, and pry into the most insignificant affairs of our neighbours.

Curiosity is an intellectual appetite, which is scarcely appeased before it presses us again; and the pleasure of knowledge consists less in possessing than in acquiring it; which shews the necessity of a progression in knowledge, in order to render us happy; and to derive from this progression all the pleasure which can result from knowledge, it is necessary

cessary that we should always preserve our free-agency, the use of our liberty, the voluntary exercise of our faculties. Our progress in knowledge is, in this case, a continual renovation of the pleasure of gratifying our intellectual appetite; and our enjoyment is increased by the flattering consideration, that it is the fruit of our own exertions.

But in order to animate us to seek after knowledge, and support us through our studies with cheerfulness, it is necessary that our exertions should not become disagreeable through too much labour; that our faculties, talents, and assistances, should always bear an exact proportion to the object in question; that a well-grounded hope of success should make every thing easy to us, just so far as that even the most attentive study may become a pleasure; that nothing
should

should interrupt our occupations against our own inclinations; that we should have a glimpse, in the depths of infinity, of an inexhaustible fund to supply that intellectual appetite which is continually increasing; and above all, that we should be as certain of an eternal duration as we are of our own existence and of that of the Creator.

Let us consider, according to these ideas, our situation in this world with regard to knowledge; and from thence, in regulating our observations by the declarations or insinuations of the Scriptures, we may conjecture, in some degree, what will be our situation in heaven.

In many respects our knowledge here below far exceeds what is necessary to direct us in providing for our natural wants; so much so, that if the Creator had limited
our

our duration to the short space of human life, it would be impossible to comprehend with what design he could have given to man a capacity, which extends to innumerable speculations, not requisite for the supply of our necessities; and this is of itself a strong proof, that the present state is only the beginning, the infancy of our existence.

On the other hand, our understanding is in some respects so weak and imperfect, that it is frequently unable to guide us through those obstacles, which continually impede our pursuit of the most useful knowledge.

This imperfection of our faculties is unavoidably attendant on our present state of probation; and it is a mortifying reflection, that, after our strongest efforts to penetrate into the depths of science, we can discover only a small part of the ways and works of

GOD.

GOD. Not only the universe itself, but an insect, a plant, and even a single hair, offers to our curiosity matter for profound and often fruitless investigation. Far from being in danger of objects failing us, we are confounded by their abundance. Thousands of ages, of such a life as ours, would not suffice to glance slightly over the ten-thousandth part of them. But of what use to us is this excessive abundance, this astonishing profusion of exquisite gratifications, if we have scarcely time allowed us to taste a very few of them; unless the Creator, who places them before us, and who continually excites that appetite which he gave us, designs to bring us again to this magnificent banquet, and to allow us to enjoy it for ever?

In Heaven, through the goodness and power of Him who has created us, and who
will

will raise us from the dead, our faculties will be endued with the precise degree of perfection requisite for our making a rapid progress in all intellectual attainments. I regard the resurrection of the body as an acknowledged fact, for I write to Christians; "but we shall all be changed;"* and we may reasonably suppose that change to consist, not only in a freedom from bodily infirmities, but in the attainment of a much more perfect organization. A blind man has no idea of the pleasure produced by sight, or a deaf man of the delights of harmony; and as we know that even in this world, there are sensations of which some individuals are entirely ignorant, surely it is not unreasonable to conclude, that our glorified bodies may be endued with new modes of percep-

* 1 Cor. xv. 51.

tion,

tion, which may convey to the soul new sources of enjoyment, infinitely varied, and continually increasing, in an eternal progression of happiness. By attempting entirely to spiritualize our celestial existence, we reduce ourselves to the impossibility of forming the least idea of it; and while we acknowledge a resurrection of the body, we in fact deny it. To this cause, perhaps, amongst others, is owing the coldness and indifference with which even the best people too often regard the joys of heaven; and the assertion, so often repeated, that we can form no idea at all of our future state. Yet we cannot reasonably complain of the unsatisfactoriness of that information, which few of us endeavour to obtain; and it will not, I think, be difficult to prove, that in these researches, the Holy Scripture confirms the deductions of reason.

The expressions of St. Paul, Our body
 “raised in glory,”^b which implies an incon-
 ceivable improvement of our organs; “then
 “we shall see face to face;”^c “now we
 “walk by faith, not by sight;”^d “now we
 “know in part, but when that which is
 “perfect is come, that which is in part shall
 “be done away;”^e—the comparison which
 the same apostle makes between our present
 state, and that in which we shall be in
 heaven, “when I was a child, I spake as a
 “child, I understood as a child, I thought
 “as a child; but when I became a man, I
 “put away childish things;”^f—what St.
 John says, in speaking of God, that “we
 “shall see him as he is;”^g—all these passages

^b 1 Cor. xv. 43.^c 1 Cor. xiii. 12.^d 2 Cor. v. 7.^e 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10.^f 1 Cor. xiii. 11.^g 1 John iii. 2.

establish,

establish, as so many infallible truths, the flattering ideas which mere reason ventures to present to us only as conjectures.

We shall see God face to face. Of what nature will be that view or that knowledge? Here it would be rash and absurd to conjecture; because, in order to be in a state to do it, we must be invested with the faculties requisite to conceive that kind of knowledge: that is, we must be now, what we shall be after a glorious resurrection. When St. Paul was caught up to heaven in a miraculous extacy, he heard things which he declares to be "unspeakable."^b Thus with regard to the manner of the beatific vision, we are in a profound ignorance here below; but we may venture to assert, that we shall know God, and every other object, with a

^b 2 Cor. xii. 4.

strength,

strength, a facility, a clearness of conception, infinitely superior to all which the finest capacity can hope for on earth, from the longest study. The soul, invested with a spiritual body, and thus provided with organs incomparably more perfect than those with which it is now connected, will have great advantages for acquiring knowledge, and making a rapid progress in it. The attributes of God, the conduct of his providence, his vast designs, and, as proceeding from them, the wonders of creation, of which we now discern only a small part; all these objects of infinite grandeur, beauty, variety, and importance, in the study of which we are every moment sensible of the weakness of our understandings, will be placed within the reach of our observation.

By

By the lustre of the heavenly ray with which God will enlighten us, a thousand admirable novelties will burst upon our sight; in him, and by him, we shall see all around us what at present eye cannot see, hear what at present ear cannot hear, and our hearts shall conceive what at present they cannot conceive.

Those who sail upon the ocean, some leagues from land, see only the coasts. Those who have the clearest eyes, with the best instruments, discern in this confused landscape only some objects, which are lost to others, and which strongly excite curiosity. Night comes on, and veils the prospect from their sight. During their sleep the vessel approaches the port, and at sun-rise casts anchor. They land; a thousand beautiful and magnificent objects present themselves

on

on every side, infinitely excelling all which the distant view had induced them to imagine.

Thus we shall enjoy in heaven, to a degree beyond all conception, the pleasures of novelty and surprise, of finding our curiosity satisfied, or at least ourselves provided with means to enable us to satisfy it: for if we were to suppose that God would display to us at once, all which we hope to know through eternity, this would be, according to my ideas, to suppose that he would rob our knowledge of one of its greatest charms.

In proportion as the truths we are to learn shall become more difficult to comprehend, we shall doubtless acquire talents adapted to them; and thus we shall go on from strength to strength, with regard to the pleasure of acquiring and possessing knowledge,

knowledge, as in every respect we shall rise from glory to glory.

The studies requisite to advance in this manner will not be oppressive labours. The assistance which may be necessary to us, an infinite number of beings more intelligent than ourselves, and full of celestial goodness, will be eager to offer. If they are now “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister “for them who shall be heirs of salvation,”¹ will they not then rejoice to associate with us, when, purified from the corruptions of mortality, we shall be “as the angels which “are in heaven?”² Whatever may be the length of the attentions requisite to attain to a certain point, the hope, or rather assurance of success, will support, animate, and fill us with joy.

¹ Heb. i. 14.

² Mark xii. 25.

Our progress, always equal to our faculties, and not retarded by involuntary interruptions, will be great and rapid. In a world where we shall be freed from all the cares which are here requisite for our subsistence, our clothing, our lodging; where we shall sleep no more; where “there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain;”¹ where all, far from molesting us, or deranging our plans of study, will favour them; it is evident that we must have undisturbed leisure to execute them.

At the same time, with such great advantages for enjoying these pleasures, and notwithstanding the vast treasure of science which we shall have collected through myriads of ages,—we shall never lose for a moment that soothing idea, so necessary to

¹ Rev. xxi. 4.

the happiness of every being who values the pleasure of acquiring knowledge; that the source of this gratification will never fail. In God, and the immensity of his works, there is an inexhaustible fund of materials to satisfy the most unbounded curiosity; but though assured that we shall never arrive at a period when there will be no more to learn, yet we shall still preserve a stedfast hope, that we shall perfectly understand all the objects which offer themselves for our investigation.

It may be objected, in answer to these observations on the extent of our capacities in a future state, and the means which will be afforded us for obtaining knowledge, that there will probably be some things, the entire comprehension of which will be reserved for God alone; as it is reasonable to suppose

pose that the creature, however perfect, can never acquire complete ideas of every thing relative to the Deity; and, in that case, that we may feel our curiosity strongly excited, without being possessed of the means to satisfy it. But I believe, that when we shall have attained to such an exalted understanding, we shall have all the discernment requisite to distinguish between what is to be known to the creature, and what to the Supreme Being alone; and, always subject to the guidance of reason, we shall be able, without difficulty, to restrain our curiosity within the same limits, which will necessarily, from the nature of things, be prescribed to our knowledge. The most noble ambition would be extravagant, if it engaged a created being to desire to usurp the place of his Creator: this therefore will not happen: the most

most ardent imagination will not aspire so high. The most vehement curiosity will be repressed, the moment we shall perceive, that to attempt to penetrate further, would be to encroach upon the privileges of the Most High; to wish to be what He is, what He alone can be. Always humble and grateful, always joyfully submitting our own will to that of the all-wise God, whom we shall love with all our soul, we shall no sooner arrive at those unfathomable depths, than retreating with respect, and acknowledging our dependance on him, we shall, without regret, turn all our attention and enquiries towards that multitude of objects, upon which we may innocently and successfully indulge our curiosity.

If then we are in the smallest degree susceptible of those pleasures which are the
most

most worthy of a thinking being, the idea of seeing God as he is must excite very strong desires; and how natural is it to seek incessantly the means to fulfil those desires, and to employ those means without delay?

They are all comprehended in this word, *holiness*. Those alone will be admitted into the adorable presence of God, who labour sincerely and assiduously in the work of their sanctification. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord:"^m "depart from me, ye that work iniquity."ⁿ

To meditate on God as soon as we are capable of reasoning, to apply afterwards to that meditation more and more, is a sure path to holiness, and a most powerful incentive to exert every possible effort to practise it with diligence. Even an indistinct and

^m Heb. xii. 14.ⁿ Matth. vii. 23.

limited knowledge of the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty, such a knowledge as we may acquire in the present life, must fill our hearts with comfort and joy. God, in the glories of the gospel dispensation, is the God of mercy, the God of peace. What treasures of benignity! What effusions of grace! He is amiable, adorable, beyond all expression, all conception: our language has no terms, our heart no sentiments, adequate to this sublime subject.

We may reasonably suppose, that all the endeavours which we employ upon earth to know God, shall not be lost to us in heaven; and that those who in this world shall acquire the best knowledge of Him, will have, at their entrance into the habitations of glory, the qualities most requisite for seeing Him as he is.

Every

Every man, who shall not have been bewildered by false information; who shall stedfastly have followed, through the interposing mists of error, those rays of light which God has diffused through the universe; and above all, he, who favoured with that shining light displayed in the gospel, shall constantly have employed it as a guide to direct him into the paths of truth; in a word, every man who, uninfluenced by prejudice, shall not have adopted any of those systems which give us false notions of our great God, notions injurious to the divine majesty, will have nothing to correct in the copy, which, faint as it is, now affords him so much satisfaction. He sees God only as through *a glass*; he sees him only at a distance; yet at least his glass is true; if it represents the image faintly and *darkly*, it
does

does not represent it falsely; but when he shall enter into the regions of bliss, before the throne of God, he shall see Him in the brightness of his glory. Happy here below, when we faintly discern him such as he is; how supremely blest shall we be, when we shall “behold him face to face; when we “shall know, even as also we are known!”

• 1 Cor. xiii. 12.



ON THE
HAPPINESS
OF THE
LIFE TO COME.

PART II.

I Have as yet only considered what may satisfy our boundless curiosity in the knowledge which we shall have of God in the future state, but there are many other delightful sentiments with which this knowledge may inspire us.

When we contemplate objects which deserve our admiration, and which are besides connected with our self-love, or with our generous and social affections, then to the
pleasure

pleasure of admiring, are united various other pleasures, which animate and extend it in proportion to the number and greatness of these objects. I will endeavour to illustrate this by a familiar example.

Let me suppose myself conducted into a palace, from thence into a garden, from thence into a beautiful country, where art and nature have united to form all which we can imagine pleasant, commodious, and lovely. I have leisure to admire the most striking beauties: I do so, with the indifference of a stranger, who is immediately to quit these charming scenes, where neither himself nor his friends have the least possession; but at the instant of my departure, my conductor stops to tell me, that all which I have just seen belongs to me and to my friends. I return: I remark, with an extreme

treme surprise, that even in the most trifling things, the most scrupulous attention has been paid to our taste; that even the smallest flower is disposed according to our fancy: then my admiration is raised to the highest degree: the little flower, artfully placed in that particular spot to gratify me, affords me a much more lively pleasure than I had felt before in the contemplation of all the enchanting beauties of this terrestrial paradise. But the emotions of my heart towards him to whose goodness I owe this magnificent gift, are of a different nature, and diffuse over my soul the sweetest sentiments of love and gratitude.

This will be our case in heaven. At first astonished at the objects which will offer themselves to our observation on every side, and afterwards reflecting on the goodness of the

the Creator who has given them to us, and disposed our minds to enjoy them, we shall admire their several relations to our faculties; and a minute examination of these will increase our admiration to infinity, and continually awaken in our hearts a new emotion of gratitude and love.

To the prospect of this treasure of felicity, which will be displayed before our eyes, will be added the recollection of all which God shall have done to secure the possession of it to us.

“ Is memory’s magic only felt below ?

“ Say, thro’ what brighter realms she bids it flow ;

“ To what pure spirits, in a nobler sphere,

“ She yields delight, but faintly imag’d here.”^p

We shall retrace, to a remote period, that amazing variety of combinations, circum-

^p Pleasures of Memory.

stances,

stances, and events, which the providence of God shall have brought to pass to work out our salvation. Our particular reflections upon ourselves will soon extend to the whole human race. In unfolding the work of our redemption, which will then be completed, we shall by degrees discover the depths of that wisdom, and that love, which have shone forth in Jesus Christ, and which at present the angels themselves cannot totally penetrate. What here appears most obscure in the dispensations of Providence, what sometimes confounds, alarms, and discourages us, will then appear to have been evidently necessary to the divine system, and the most mysterious parts to have been the most skilfully contrived and disposed.

In the same manner, with regard to the evils of this life, of which we now sometimes

times complain so bitterly, which we support with such impatience, and which we every moment fear should betray us into injurious murmurs against our heavenly Father, we shall perceive that to them we are in some degree indebted for our state of glory. With what joy shall we then reflect on these favourable evils, these happy afflictions! What transports of love and gratitude to God will be excited by this retrospect of the past! We shall continually recur to this affecting idea, and dwell upon it with rapture. Though here his designs sometimes appear obscure, and his dispensations mysterious; yet there we shall perceive that they had constantly been conducive to our happiness; but that the steadfastness of his affection, and his profound knowledge of what would best contribute to our felicity, had

had engaged him to impose upon us a discipline accommodated to our dispositions and our state upon earth, and which consequently had been sometimes severe. Regarding then, in the true point of view, all his conduct towards us, we shall discover an admirable union of the tenderest care, the most consummate prudence, and the most inimitable skill, to guide and impel us insensibly towards a state of everlasting happiness. The pleasure of surprise, of a comparison between our present and our past situation, all the augmentation which our joy can receive from the most soothing reflections, we shall enjoy to the utmost. If our happiness would be complete in itself, without the aid of such a comparison, what vivacity of sentiment will it not add to it! The contemplation of the dispensations of
God,

God, in every part of this retrospect, will raise in our souls sentiments of gratitude and love, of which our happiest experiences in piety upon earth can give us but a faint idea.

When a prosperous event befalls us in this world, if we connect with that event a firm persuasion that it is in a peculiar manner the effect of the approbation and favour with which God honours us, we shall have infinitely greater joy in that persuasion, than in the benefit itself which his providence has just bestowed upon us. The sentiments of affection and gratitude, which arise in our minds towards a benefactor worthy of all our veneration, all our attachment, are far superior in value to the gift which we receive from him. This gift is a pledge of his affection, and that consideration awakens all

our

our own: that engaging idea is what principally renders it precious to us. This is true above all with regard to GOD; for besides the present advantage which we enjoy, besides the delightful sentiments of gratitude and love which it inspires, we may infer from it what are the designs of the Most High, and what will be his future dealing with us. His favour once obtained, we do not lose it but by our own fault; there is no caprice, no inconstancy, to be feared from GOD. What may we not then expect and hope! What sweet emotions arise at once in our souls! And in heaven how clear, how convincing, will this argument be!

Here below, besides that we are prevented from beholding, by the "clouds and "darkness which are round about," our

^r Psa. xcvi. 2.

good God, the full perfection of that "righteousness and judgment which are the habitation of his throne;" and from tasting that "joy unspeakable and full of glory," with which a clear perception of him would fill every heart; besides this obscurity, there is often another obstacle, incomparably more difficult to surmount, and which we ourselves create; this is sin. We are the same with regard to God, as we usually are with regard to our friends; as soon as we have acted ill towards them, or in any manner rendered ourselves less worthy of their affection, we immediately feel our own diminish. Frequently, in consequence of the injury which an unjust offender has committed, he hates the offended person more than he is hated by him.

* 1 Pet. i. 8.

Of all mental evils, the greatest and the most insupportable is remorse of conscience. To those who have been guilty of enormous crimes, it is a sensation of inexpressible anguish; but every species of guilt, every degree of sin, creates in the mind uneasiness and confusion, in proportion to the sentence which we pass upon our actions; and it is impossible to elude the judgment of our own conscience, or to render ourselves indifferent to its awful voice.

Shame, as well as remorse, is always revived by the sight of the person we have injured; it strikes through the heart, and we fly, we abhor, whatever awakens it. The idea of a witness of our unworthiness, especially when that witness is the person with regard to whom we are guilty, is a tormenting idea. If to shame be added a well-

well-grounded fear of suffering the punishment deserved, we have then a complication of emotions which distract us. Such is our deplorable situation with regard to God, when we have trampled on his sacred laws, and despised his salutary counsels. The sentiments of soothing confidence, of sincere and ardent love, which we once felt towards him, are weakened by the shock of various opposite sentiments. Our heavenly Father, who was once the source of our tranquillity, of our consolation and joy, becomes a source of shame and fear; and if we are not diligent to suppress this tumult in our souls, by sincere repentance and speedy amendment, we expose ourselves to the most formidable of all dangers, that of changing into aversion those sentiments of filial duty and affection which we once felt towards

towards that adorable and almighty Being. If we were always wise and virtuous, we should here enjoy, in a high degree, the pleasure of loving God; but even those who have made the greatest progress in the work of sanctification, have always sufficient cause to reproach themselves. This is what principally cools that celestial ardour, and mingles much bitterness with all its gratifications.

In heaven this great obstacle will be removed. If at first we should feel some degree of shame, on the recollection of the numerous weaknesses, omissions, and errors, which had interrupted the work of our sanctification, and should be confused at obtaining rewards so greatly surpassing all which we could reasonably expect from our cares and exertions; cares so continually interrupted, exertions frequently so languid; these

these painful reflections will immediately be alleviated by the propitious aspect of our Heavenly Father, and afterwards entirely absorbed in the profusion of his favours. Having once and for ever "cast away our sins," and ceased to "remember our iniquities;"* having accepted our good intentions and our feeble endeavours, he will obviate at the moment of our entrance into glory, by every testimony of paternal affection, all which might give us uneasiness. Like the indulgent and tender father, in the affecting parable of the prodigal son; who, instead of uttering the least reproach to his returning penitent, was anxious to dry up his tears, hastened to embrace him, and bestowed upon him innumerable caresses and benefits; he will not leave us time to recal

* Micah vii. 19.

* Heb. viii. 12.

to our minds those painful sentiments which his ineffable goodness will exclude for ever and ever.

In our present state we are surrounded by those dangerous enemies of our soul, temptations. However important may be the advantages which we have obtained, and however firm may be our confidence in future victories, through the grace of God, yet we must still sustain the combat; we are exposed to surprise, and frequently, alas! we yield to it. We must live in a state of continual watchfulness, lest, in an unguarded moment, we should be led astray from the path of duty; "for our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."^x How delightful then will be that tranquillity and

^x 1 Pet. v.

peace, which we shall enjoy, when such shall be our happy situation, such our spiritual strength, that, instead of temptations to guard against, we shall find, in every object around us, something to afford an agreeable exercise to our virtue.

From all which shall have befallen us in this world, and above all, from the happiness we shall experience at our entrance into the next, we may deduce prophetic consequences, which will be a transporting anticipation of those degrees of glory and felicity, which we shall not at first possess. I am in the harbour of salvation, safe from a thousand dangers from which I have just escaped: they exist no longer, except in my remembrance. These dangers, formerly so terrible, now only form a strong contrast, which makes me feel more sensibly my present

sent security. Tranquil and happy in the midst of my friends, I look forward only to pleasures, pure, infinitely varied, and eternal.

We can conceive but very imperfectly the delights of such a situation; yet there are circumstances in this world, which may perhaps convey to the mind a faint idea of it. For example, you escape miraculously from a shipwreck; you land amidst the embraces of beloved friends, from whom you had been separated for many years, and whom you had scarcely hoped to meet again; you hear the sea still roaring behind you, but in vain; you find yourself in a peaceful and charming asylum, amidst the sweetest transports of the tenderest affection. "Such a deliverance," says the elegant and amiable Dr. BEATTIE, "will every good man meet with at last, when he is taken away from
" the

“ the evils of life, and awakes in the regions of everlasting peace; looking back on the world and its troubles with a surprise and satisfaction, similar in kind, tho’ far higher in degree, to that which we now feel, when we awake from a terrifying dream, and open our eyes upon the sweet serenity of a summer morning.”

All will be joy and exultation. The bitter streams which mingle with the sweets of this life, will then be totally dried up. No more remorse, no more shame or anxiety, shall there interrupt our felicity: (allow me to use some repetition and recapitulation, for we return with pleasure to such objects, and love to dwell upon them:) from reviewing, in the records of the past, the depths of the wisdom and mercy of God, we shall derive a thousand inexpressible pleasures. In
reflecting

reflecting on our passage through mortality, that dangerous passage, which, in spite of so many errors and wanderings, shall at length, through the indulgence and assistance of our heavenly Father, have conducted us to that happy abode; we shall find, not only in the best actions and most favourable events of our lives, but in our misfortunes, our dangers, and even in our failings, subjects for admiration and joy. On the other side, the immensity of that futurity to which we shall look forward, will be a boundless perspective, presenting a progressive succession, a constant and inexhaustible store of knowledge and pleasure, of amiable sentiments, and generous designs; which, uneclipsed, and uninterrupted, continually extend the amazing prospect, and augment the magnificent scene; ascending, through a state of gradual,

gradual, but constant improvement, to the centre of all glory and felicity; the throne of the Most High:

These prospects, so flattering to ourselves, will also include all the intelligent beings which surround us. Those beams of light and life, which proceed from the throne of the LORD, will have dispersed every cloud, and dispelled every shadow of death. They will diffuse around a perfect serenity, an ineffable and glorious joy.

It is not sufficient to be happy ourselves, or rather we cannot be happy alone: it is also necessary that all those should be made happy, who are capable of becoming so. What pleasure must a generous soul derive from contemplating the Supreme Being, continually establishing, without partiality, all the happiness which is suitable to every one,

one, or of which every one is susceptible. But of this noble pleasure we are entirely destitute here below. None of our fellow-creatures are perfectly happy, and a great number of them are in a state of suffering. This alone would be sufficient to render the happiness of the present life imperfect, even if it were a situation in other respects the most desirable. If, with the assurance of our own safety, we cannot connect that of the safety of the friends whom we love, our tranquillity must be very imperfect. But in heaven, our friends, (if they have not been totally unworthy of that name) our dearest friends, will be with us, in perfect security, in the presence of our benevolent God. The power of pain and death over them, as well as over ourselves, will have ceased; and consequently all that dejection, and those variations

variations of temper, which corporeal disorders sometimes occasion upon earth, will cease also; and amongst beings so wise, so good, so refined, both in body and soul, we shall enjoy an intercourse always undisturbed and always free.

Happy in ourselves and in our friends, we shall also rejoice in the felicity of all around us. To feel sincerely and forcibly the happiness of others, is in some measure to increase our own, in proportion to the number of the blessed. This will be more particularly considered when I speak of our sentiments in regard to our fellow-creatures; but it is principally to God, that all the various sentiments which I have mentioned must be referred. He will be the great object of our love, the strength of our confidence, and the source of all our happiness.

Every

Every pleasure which we enjoy will continually attract our attention to Him, by constantly setting before us his tender cares: it will be in Him that we shall see the glorious plan of universal felicity, which shall increase through all eternity: in a word, according to the admirable expression of St. Paul, he will be "all in all." He will not only be the most essential object of all our attachment, the inexhaustible treasure, as well as the original cause, of our greatest pleasures; we shall not only trace his hand continually, in every new effect of his wisdom and beneficence, but He himself will penetrate even to the inmost recesses of our hearts. He has formed them, he sees them, and knows their most secret sentiments. It is He who has put in motion all the springs

1 Cor. xv. 28.

of our felicity, and it will be in his presence that we shall find fulness of joy. Nothing is too vast for his power, nothing too difficult for his wisdom, nothing too beneficent for his goodness. What a variety of delightful sentiments he will create in us, in manifesting himself to us as he is; and in giving room to our liberty, our understandings, and our affections, to exert themselves according to our wishes, and at the same time in the pursuit of our greatest good!

He shall be all in all! This great, this good God will fill our souls with that joy which his adorable presence will diffuse throughout the universe. All which is pleasing, all which is transporting, in admiration, in gratitude, in love, in confidence, in hope; in the anticipated accomplishment of the generous wishes formed by a noble heart,

heart, glowing with fraternal affection; in the prospect of an infinite variety of blessings, at which we shall sooner or later arrive, all adapted to contribute in some measure to our happiness; and finally in the prospect of an eternal augmentation of excellence and felicity;—all this we shall possess and enjoy without alloy, and with a warmth and energy of sentiment, which we neither feel, nor *can* feel, here below; for the LORD himself, from whom proceedeth “every good and every perfect gift,”² will be “the portion of our inheritance”¹ to all eternity.

² James i. 17.¹ Psa. xvi. 5.

ON THE

ON THE

HAPPINESS

OF THE

LIFE TO COME.

PART III.

I Shall now make a few observations on those sentiments which will arise from our connexion with our fellow-creatures, and with the other inhabitants of the mansions of immortality.

We are so formed for society, that we cannot imagine happiness without it. The idea of an abode where it would be impossible for us to meet with any of our fellow-creatures,

creatures, a desert island for instance, upon which we might be cast by a shipwreck, has something in it melancholy and dreadful. In vain should that island be represented as the garden of Eden; this would have no influence upon us. But let us suppose that a second shipwreck should cast on the same coast two or three persons, possessed of talents and merit to deserve our esteem; this idea immediately diffuses over our heart consolation and joy. This pleasure does not arise from reflecting on the assistance which we may derive from each other, in procuring the necessaries of life. Though nature herself should have formed for us a commodious and agreeable habitation, tho' our food should spring up spontaneously, though the useful animals should come to us of their own accord, or suffer themselves

to

to be taken and tamed without difficulty; all this could not compensate for the absence of every being upon whom we could fix that social affection by which our hearts are animated. All which might give us pleasure, if we were not alone, would in solitude become insipid and wearisome.

“ In Solitude

“ What happiness? Who can enjoy alone,

“ Or all enjoying, what contentment find?”^b

It is not therefore because we could not subsist, or not without painful and continual exertions, that we love our fellow-creatures; but because we are formed to love them; because our sentiments towards them, and theirs towards us, are the principal sources, the great springs of our felicity. It is true that the caprices and vices of those with

^b Milton.

whom

whom we are connected, frequently suspend, impede, and restrain, our natural affections; and sometimes change into aversion our strongest propensity towards friendship. Then these affections resemble affrighted birds; after a long and wavering flight, if they rest any where at last, it is without confidence, and every moment prepared to fly off again. This suspicious disposition is frequently very excessive; and it is generally owing in a great measure to ourselves.

In judging of the actions of others, and especially of such actions as are evidently doubtful, we are too apt to suffer ourselves to be biassed by prejudice. Thus an understanding, on other occasions just and penetrating, may be deceived; and this error is the more fatal, as it is certainly unjust and cruel. A man endued with excellent moral
faculties,

faculties, which he has assiduously cultivated, perceives instantaneously in every action what motives would on such an occasion infallibly have influenced himself. He discovers some just causes for suspicion, but his impartial mind is in a state to decide, according to the strictest rules of equity, whether the fact may be considered in the most advantageous light, or whether there be a strong foundation for doubt; and he concludes with humility, that at the worst it may be one of those actions in which some evil is blended with the good. But those observers, who yield imperceptibly to a secret jealousy, or who prefer the reputation of penetration to that of charity, have not recourse to laudable motives, if they can without them explain the mystery with an air of plausibility, or with the hope of pleasing the multitude:
they

they confidently assert that such motives had no part in the action; and applauding themselves for such an ingenious discovery, they raise it as a trophy to their pride; for pride generally gives rise to that false policy, which makes us judge so rigorously of the actions of others. If such be the weakness of human nature, that we must one way or other deviate from the point of perfection, it is infinitely more for our own comfort, and for that of all around us, that we should err on the side of affection and benevolence. It is better to be exposed to the danger of deception, than to torment ourselves with subjects of suspicion, perhaps entirely imaginary.

Again: frequently possessed by some passion which prevents us from cultivating diligently these sweet affections, we suffer them

to

to be enfeebled, 'till we render ourselves almost insensible to them; our self-love becomes confined; it can no longer cherish even those sentiments which were the most calculated to gratify it. By thus neglecting, and leaving unexercised, our social and generous dispositions, we accustom ourselves by degrees to consider our fellow-creatures as so many instruments from which we may derive some advantage in the affairs of life; but we lose the idea of the pleasure which arises from the exercise of benevolent affections. Still more; we suffer to perish in our souls the sublime satisfaction of desiring the happiness of others, without any interested view to our own: then we regard with indifference those who cannot render us any service, or contribute in any manner to our amusement. Confined within a narrow sphere,

sphere, we do not extend our social affections beyond a small number of friends: perhaps there may be some who, strictly speaking, cannot be said to love any one of their fellow-creatures.

But even those who, partly through the faults of others, and partly through their own, are thus almost contracted within themselves, would, with the most pleasing surprise, feel themselves animated by sentiments of affection towards all around them, could they be assured that they were all estimable and amiable, and inspired with a sincere and tender regard for them.

This will be our case in heaven. We shall be secure of meeting, in each of the blessed, with every disposition, every affection, every sentiment, which we would wish to find in them.

We

We all have a natural desire to be esteemed and beloved. The fact is incontestible. This is an admirable motive to induce us to exert all our faculties in the most advantageous manner; to unite ourselves to each other by the tenderest friendship; to perform the noblest actions. The wisdom and goodness of God are displayed in this disposition of our hearts. In this world, the various imperfections of human nature, both in ourselves and others, often prevent us from gratifying that noble desire. But the worst of men cannot entirely divest themselves of regard for the approbation of their fellow-creatures. That affection and esteem which by means of certain qualities and actions we may have lost with some, we endeavour to regain with others by different qualities and an altered conduct; but the success is always uncertain.

It will not be thus in heaven. All its inhabitants, being really estimable and amiable, will be constantly esteemed and beloved. We shall no longer be deceived, with regard either to the proper objects of esteem and friendship, or the proper means of inspiring them with the same sentiments towards ourselves.

Endued with the most excellent faculties, far more susceptible than we now are of moral pleasures; zealous imitators of God, whom we shall then see continually "face to face:" we shall love all those innumerable beings who will eternally surround his throne, with a warmth, a delicacy, and a constancy, which we can but imperfectly conceive in this world. God loves us better, infinitely better, than the most tender father loves his only son. His affection for

us will animate our fraternal love: considering all our fellow-creatures as his children, we shall feel for them that peculiar regard with which we are naturally inspired for every object, considered by those who are dear to us as worthy of theirs. We shall love every intelligent being, for God, and in God. Every circumstance also will concur to promote our union and mutual affection.

Here it is quite otherwise; we frequently meet with jarring interests, misunderstandings, obscurities, and difficulties, in our affairs and claims, discussions on property, oppressive customs, tyrannical prejudices, and false notions; from whence arise fears, suspicions, and disputes. Add to these, the danger we incur of making an improper choice; and the difficulty of inspiring others
with

with perfect confidence. There are also jealousies and wars between entire nations; the disadvantageous opinions, the enmities, which a trifle suddenly produces, are fomented and increased through succeeding ages; in a word, innumerable events, both public and private, destroy mutual affection, or render it feeble, partial, and limited.

However well disposed we may be, it is not possible for this sentiment to influence our hearts in its full force and extent. Either from a deficiency of deserving objects, or from various other accidental causes, it seldom happens, in the course of a long life, that we acquire more than two or three friends towards whom we can indulge it without constraint or diminution; some defect, some trifling circumstance, restrains or interrupts it; and even in the happiest friendships,

ships, the impossibility of continually enjoying the society of all the objects of our affection, the necessity of separating from some in order to associate with others, render our tenderest connexions in this world sources of pain as well as of pleasure.

In the mutual services which we render to each other, there are generally several imperfections: perhaps we defer them too long; we do not extend them to the utmost; in conferring a favour we may fail to observe a proper delicacy, and give pain to the person obliged by our manner of bestowing a benefit; when we have been great benefactors, we are apt almost insensibly to assume an authority, which those who are the objects of our kindness feel, without venturing to complain of it. On the other side, those who have received obligations, though really equitable,

equitable, and sincerely disposed to gratitude, are often deceived with regard to the true value of the favours bestowed: various suspicions respecting the motive of the benefit, some trifling error in the manner of conferring it, some inattention to that *subtile essence*^c which constitutes the *gracious* in word or action; or, finally, that ascendancy which the benefactor gains, and of which he sometimes makes an improper use:—all these disturb and weaken gratitude, discourage and abate affection.

How uncommon is perfect mutual affection here below! Besides various subjects for reciprocal distrust, what a trifle disquiets us! And those almost imperceptible defects, which occasion slight mortifications, few

^c See Miss H. MORE's charming poem on Sensibility.

people are sufficiently unprejudiced to discover clearly in themselves, or to bear with meekness and thankfulness to be told of them by others; and how few are there who ever eradicate them entirely!

In conversation, and in our social recreations, many little difficulties arise, which greatly diminish the pleasure they might afford. Such are, the constraint often imposed upon us; our uncertainty of what attentions, or what subjects of discourse, would be the most acceptable; the reserve, the indifference, the ignorance of some; the excessive vivacity and arrogance of others; amusements ill chosen, in which we neglect and offend some person, because a separate interest interposes; a failure in respect; marked preferences, which render some indifferent, and raise jealousy and indignation

tion in the hearts of others; frequently an unpolite eagerness, which leads several persons to speak at the same time, to interrupt each other, or to suffer no one to be heard but themselves. By these means the most interesting conversations degenerate into broken sentences, without order, and without consistency; or change into tedious soliloquies, which reduce a man of taste to solitary meditation in the midst of a large company; as few people have attained to that perfect politeness which can give a long and uninterrupted attention to that which is disagreeable or uninteresting, notwithstanding it is so necessary to the real comfort of life: all this creates disgust, restlessness, impatience, and a desire to be elsewhere.

“ These, and a thousand griefs minute as these,

“ Corrode our comfort, and destroy our ease.”^d

^d Poem on Sensibility.

It would be an endless task to enumerate the various unpleasant circumstances which intrude themselves into society, even amongst those who have always the inclination to render it agreeable, and talents to enable them to do so.

That all these inconveniencies will be excluded from heaven, we shall be convinced, when we consider the difference of our faculties, sentiments, and situation there. An unbounded confidence, united hearts, souls open to each other, celestial benevolence; a sovereign contempt for those vain distinctions which flatter our confined imaginations here below; a pure and ardent affection, and in consequence of that, an unwearied endeavour to promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures, by gratifying to the utmost of our power their inclinations and tastes; inclinations

inclinations well-regulated and amiable, tastes corrected and refined, and which we shall discover distinctly at the first interview:—It appears evident to me, that with all these favourable circumstances, a real and reasonable politeness, that politeness which, proceeding from the heart where charity reigns, excludes all troublesome formalities, and exerts the most obliging attentions, will universally prevail amongst such beings as the inhabitants of heaven must be supposed to be.

Not only an opposition of interests can have no place there, but on the contrary, all our interests must necessarily be united. If the objects which might be profitable to us, were sufficiently abundant to be equally useful to us all; or if they were of such a nature, that each of us might obtain the possession

possession of them, without destroying or diminishing that of others; if every one, satisfied with his own present pleasures, patiently waiting 'till his lawful exertions should procure greater for him, regarded those of others with no view but to congratulate them sincerely upon their enjoyment of them: in short, if the happiness of each individual, far from being prejudicial to others, augmented the felicity of all; and if every affection, concentered in the Supreme Being, tended in conformity with his to promote that universal felicity,—it is evident that each particular interest, instead of opposing the general advantage, would be closely connected with it; and that common interest would unite every heart by indissoluble bands.

This

This will be our situation in heaven; there our mutual affection, strengthened by our progress in knowledge and virtue, animated by the presence and by the love of God, encouraged by every thing around us, free from all impediments, and secure from all indifference,—will be more ardent and tender towards each individual of the blessed, than that which we now feel for the most beloved friend. Amongst so many millions of associates in felicity, we shall not exclude one from this universal regard; yet the multiplicity of the objects of our friendship will not diminish its force. We may be convinced of this, as we have many examples here below which in some measure prove it to us. A father and mother who have a numerous family, or a person who passes his life amidst a circle of chosen friends,

friends, may afford us these examples. The parent loves his children, the friend his friends, without any individual depriving the rest of the sentiments due to them; they love them all sincerely and tenderly; they cannot lose one of them without feeling a severe pang. I do not say that they have an equal affection for them all; that is not necessary; and I am far from supposing that particular friendships will be excluded from heaven. There, probably, as well as upon earth, will be those singular affinities, and favourable concurrences, which, united with true merit, form those friendships, so intimate, so precious, and so uncommon, the mere idea of which is ever soothing to the soul. Will those who by the most diligent exertions shall have established such an union upon earth, lose the fruit of all their cares

in the mansions of glory and happiness?
Surely not.

“ There thy bright train, immortal friendship, soar,
“ No more to part, to mingle tears no more!
“ And, as the softening hand of time endears
“ The joys and sorrows of our infant years;
“ So there the soul, releas’d from human strife,
“ Smiles at the little cares and ills of life,
“ Its lights and shades, its sunshine and its show’rs,
“ As at a dream that charm’d her vacant hours.”*

The imagination, ever active, ever inquisitive, loves to anticipate futurity, and to form airy scenes of happiness, which, when they relate to this world alone, frequently fade and vanish away. But when we extend our views to the realms of everlasting felicity, we may safely indulge ourselves in contemplating the enchanting prospects, which, founded on faith, and illumi-

* Pleasures of Memory.

nated by hope, will become brighter on a nearer approach, increasing *more and more unto the perfect day*. We may anticipate the happiness we shall there derive from the renewal of our earthly friendships; and such reflections will console the afflicted heart, when every other comfort fails.

When a fond parent weeps over a departed child, what consolation can the world afford? Let us suppose that child to be *the only son of his mother, and she a widow*; in vain her friends attempt to soothe her sorrows; they cannot awaken in her soul those transporting sensations which the fond caresses of her child continually excited; sensations which only parents feel. But when she looks beyond the grave, when she contemplates her once suffering infant transformed into an angel of light, she submits
with

with pious resignation to the will of her heavenly Father; while she meditates with rapture on that period, when her soul, disengaged from the fetters of mortality, shall ascend to the throne of God, and be welcomed to those blissful regions by a glorious angel, once the innocent cause of her tears, but thenceforth the sweet companion and joyful promoter of her eternal felicity!

How often is a son deprived of an affectionate and virtuous father, at that early period of life, when, assailed by temptations, and deceived by false appearances, a prudent guardian is most requisite to guide his steps in safety through surrounding dangers. What must be the transport of such a father, when he shall meet his son entering into the regions of celestial peace, to receive the reward of a virtuous and holy life;

life; and shall hear him acknowledge the advantages he had received from those principles of piety, and those examples of virtue, by which his paternal care had established his heart in the right way, during the years of childhood; which had influenced his conduct to the last moment of his mortal existence, had pointed out to him *the path of life*, and taught him to pass with religious courage through *the valley of the shadow of death!*

What must be the feelings of the pious pastor, when he shall meet those happy spirits over whom he had watched in this life with parental care and tenderness; to whom he had displayed, in their most attractive colours, the sacred doctrines of the gospel: the timid, whom he had inspired with confidence; the discontented, whom he had
armed

armed with patience; the despairing, whom he had soothed with hope; the ignorant, whom he had blest with instruction; the careless, whom he had awakened to watchfulness; the proud, whom he had converted to humility. How will he rejoice to behold their felicity, and to hear them acknowledge their gratitude to him, while with religious joy he shall behold in himself the accomplishment of that promise of scripture, "they that turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."†

Those whose precepts and example shall have extended beyond the short duration of their own life, and the narrow sphere in which they moved upon earth; whose writings shall have defended the truths of religion against the attacks of false philosophy,

† Dan. xii. 3.

and asserted the cause of pure morality in defiance of licentious sophistry; will offer continual praises to *the Lord who giveth wisdom*, who enabled them to employ their talents to his glory; and whilst in heaven they rejoice in the effects of their labours, with those glorified spirits who had derived instruction from them upon earth, they will find confirmed this sacred truth, that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the praise of it endureth for ever.”*

Perhaps some difference of opinion, some unfortunate misunderstanding, had separated on earth those who once were tenderly attached to each other; circumstances, which could not be explained, had weakened esteem, and interrupted friendship; but

* Psa. cxi. 10.

when

when all the mists of error shall vanish before the light of truth, and the man whose conduct had been unjustly blamed in this world, shall be acknowledged by his gracious Master as his *good and faithful servant*, with what rapture will that friendship be renewed, which no doubts, no suspicion, can ever more disturb: while those whose tender attachment, founded on mutual esteem, and confirmed by continual proofs of reciprocal affection, had remained unshaken, even by that stroke of death which separated them for a time, will, when they shall meet in the heavenly mansions, look forward to the everlasting enjoyment of those blessings which flow from the indulgence of the social affections, and above all, from virtuous friendship. They will fear no interruption to their felicity; for time, and all its attendant

dant cares and sorrows, will be swallowed up in eternity, and perfect happiness will be their everlasting inheritance:

“ That holy calm, that harmony of mind,

“ Where purity and peace imingle charms.”^a

Such an union supposes an assemblage on both sides of every virtue; a fervent piety and steadfast probity, an extent, a delicacy of benevolence, and of social affections, which, without being able absolutely to conquer defects and weaknesses, induce us mutually to endure and pardon them. The general effects of these dispositions and sentiments will continue for ever; and why not then this particular intimacy? Will not a connexion, founded on the same basis as our eternal felicity, endure like that for ever and ever? This pleasing hope constitutes

^a THOMSON.

here

here below the most soothing, the most solid consolation of those friends who are separated by death: it prevents this terrible enemy of all those who live *without hope, and without GOD in the world*, from depriving us, by the very idea of his approach, of the transporting pleasures of friendship. We may believe that this sweet hope will not deceive us; but that, like all the others which are founded upon the goodness of GOD, and upon what is most laudable in ourselves, and most worthy of his approbation, it will never be destroyed, until *that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away*, and

“Faith be lost in sight, and hope in joy!”¹

The inequality of rank which we have reason to believe will be established amongst

¹ Miss H. MORE's Sacred Dramas.

the glorified spirits, will not create envy or jealousy in our purified souls.* These odious passions arise only from a conflict of real or of imaginary interests, and from the abuse of a noble ambition, which is inseparable from an intelligent being. But a conflict of real interests will have no place in heaven; and imaginary opposition will, without doubt, be equally excluded from thence, for it proceeds only from our errors. With regard to that ambition which is natural to us, that constant desire to exalt and improve ourselves, we ought to cherish and encourage it; but when we direct that improperly,

* It appears from several texts of scripture, that a difference of rank prevails amongst the angels. See Rom. viii. 38. Ephes. i. 21. Col. i. 26. And the same difference between the blessed in heaven seems to be alluded to by our Saviour, Matth. xi. 11; xxv. 21, 23. Also, Luke xix. 17, 19.

which is in itself so worthy of us, when we suffer ourselves to be governed by an extravagant and impetuous imagination, we persuade ourselves that the exaltation of another debases us, that his superior felicity diminishes our own; and, judging only by a foolish comparison, we imagine that to prevent others from equalling or excelling us, is to advance ourselves, and that our happiness will be augmented, in proportion as theirs is diminished. These false and cruel ideas will not enter into the abode of the blessed, all will be rectified there, and the noblest sentiments will prevail in their utmost purity and lustre.

If envy were not totally eradicated from our minds, an equality of rank amongst the inhabitants of heaven would not prevent it from exerting its baneful influence: even if

we

we were exalted far above all created beings, yet then the Creator himself would become the object of our envy, which, regardless of the height to which we had already attained, would still aspire to be supreme.

“ Yet all his good prov’d ill in me,

“ And wrought but malice; lifted up so high

“ I ’sdain’d subjection, and thought one step higher

“ Would set me highest.”¹

If in heaven we should be subject to envy, our felicity there would be infinitely more precarious, and frequently more imperfect, than that which we enjoy upon earth. The difference of degrees of dignity or pleasure here cannot be compared with that which we shall meet with there; or, in other words, the objects which we here re-

¹ Milton.

garded as objects of envy, will then be far more numerous and considerable.

There is generally in this world a balance of good and evil, which reduces our several lots almost to an equality. In heaven, on the contrary, there will probably be degrees of rank infinitely varied. It is true that there will not be any real evils; but an envious man would create as many imaginary ills as he should find beings superior to himself, and imaginary evils produce real misery; since then envy would necessarily be productive of unhappiness, it must be excluded from those peaceable realms, where God has fixed the throne of his glory, and where concord and mutual affection will be amongst the principal sources and supports of the universal felicity. And therefore that odious passion, as well as jealousy, covetousness,

covetousness, and all which are connected with it, are so expressly, so strongly, and so frequently pointed out in the scriptures, as incompatible with that purity of heart which shall make us heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

In the presence of God, and amidst the angels and glorified saints, every one entirely free from these hateful sentiments, will be content with his lot; every one will rejoice in the superior felicity of others. It belongs only to the heavenly virtues of humility and charity, to diffuse over our hearts, through all eternity, this admirable source of tranquillity and joy: we can form but a very imperfect idea of that treasure of happiness, that amazing variety of pleasures, with which this alone will enrich the mansions of immortality. One of my fellow-
creatures

creatures makes a discovery which delights him; I also enjoy it with him. Another, superior to us both, communicates to me some new augmentation of his grandeur and felicity; I participate in it in the same manner: thus I in some measure appropriate to myself all the happiness of heaven.

In this world, either because our generous sentiments are far inferior to those which we shall then possess, because the felicity of others as well as our own is too much blended with sorrow to claim great congratulations, or that being too much occupied with our own affairs, and our own troubles, we can only receive slightly and transiently the agreeable impressions of an affectionate sympathy;—those pleasures which we derive merely from our knowledge of the pleasures of others, are seldom very lively

or

or very numerous. But these obstacles will cease in heaven: our hearts, purified and tranquil, having no other occupation than to indulge agreeable sentiments, will yield to them without reserve, and each of us shall enjoy the happiness of all the rest.

In this world there are few to whom we wish to display all the emotions of joy which we experience. Frequently we fear that our friends might find the subject frivolous, and enter into it with a degree of coldness and indifference which would give us pain; and if the person to whom we wish to open our whole soul, is much less happy than ourselves, we can scarcely avoid fearing, lest, if he should compare our lot with his own, he might feel a secret mortification from the comparison. We may suspect that he is capable of some emotions of envy,
because

because we feel a consciousness that we are so ourselves. But such doubts can have no place in heaven. After what I have said, to enlarge upon each particular would be only repetition.

The people of China and Japan imagine that it is impossible for us to be perfectly happy, whilst we see others excel us in talents, and surpass us in felicity. To reconcile this idea with the happiness of heaven, they suppose that, by an agreeable illusion, every one will there persuade himself that he is more favoured and more happy than the rest.

This proceeds from an ignorance, or at least a very imperfect knowledge, of the wonderful effects which are produced by those two excellent virtues, which shine forth with such lustre in the gospel,—humility

mility and charity. Into what absurd mistakes do they fall respecting true happiness, when they attribute it to illusion and deceit! And what should we gain by this ridiculous stratagem? We should destroy one of the most abundant sources of our celestial pleasure.

God has given me a being, he has given me a soul; he offers me a felicity which is sufficient to gratify it entirely. Shall I counteract this felicity? Shall I mingle bitterness with it, because I know that there are spirits susceptible of more extensive happiness? Far from complaining of this, I admire his goodness the more; I give him thanks with the greatest sincerity for the blessings which he has bestowed on others; this gratitude constitutes a part of the very small return which it is in my power to make

make to him, for those he has bestowed on me. My thankfulness towards him, my benevolence and tender affection towards all the rest of the blessed, who love me perhaps even to a greater degree than I love them, are essential parts of my happiness. Shall I envy their glory or felicity, because it is superior to my own? Ah, rather, how should I rejoice to be able to exalt them still higher! But I do enjoy this divine pleasure; my sentiments augment their happiness. I exercise their sublimest faculties; that which inclines my heart towards them, animates and increases their affection for me; they exert their talents to please me; I afford them the delightful employment of endeavouring to become useful to me. Thus they are indebted to me for a part of that joy which arises from being *perfect*

in

in love, as I am indebted to them for the gratitude and affection with which they inspire me.

This is assuredly the light in which we shall consider these things in heaven, and such the sentiments which will prevail there.

Then there will be no necessity for a concurrence of circumstances to form this delightful union of hearts: at the first meeting, at the first sight of an inhabitant of heaven, we shall feel a mutual attachment, and shall be *one heart and one spirit*.

In the immense regions of immortality my curiosity leads me to seek those who are unknown to me; friends whom I have never seen. I arrive amongst them; immediately all press around me, and every one endeavours to the utmost of his power to procure me pleasure. My satisfaction animates their
zeal;

zeal; and their generous and tender joy is the most delightful source of mine. I meet every where with innumerable multitudes, but never with an enemy. All those who see me, immediately wish to add to my happiness; it is their first idea, their prevailing inclination, their predominant passion. They know that my heart is inspired with the same sentiments towards them; we give reciprocal assurances of affectionate attachment, and enjoy the delightful pleasures of virtuous friendship.

This sweet sentiment will be continually augmenting; and what warmth, what delicacy, what wise and benevolent attentions, will be displayed to increase our mutual love, and to vary our mutual pleasures! One of the occupations to which we shall apply with the greatest ardour, will be to discover,

ver, and turn to advantage, every thing which can promote and extend the happiness of others.

In the present state of things it is not possible to conceive the degree of tranquillity, content, and pleasure, which will accompany that universal and reciprocal affection; especially if we suppose it infinitely more animated, as well as more pure, than it could be in this world, even if all mankind were perfectly virtuous; and we must imagine that it will be so, in consequence of the great superiority of our celestial dispositions, of the additional motives which we shall then have, and of the many favourable circumstances which we shall there meet with.

If any one should doubt whether these admirable sentiments of fraternal love will prevail

prevail in heaven, and desire a confirmation of it from scripture, he may be easily satisfied. I shall not insist upon the proofs which reason alone affords. All which I have said of our social dispositions, of our natural affections, and of the principal sources of our pleasures, offer these proofs at first sight to every attentive person; but let us consider what light revelation affords to confirm our conjectures on this interesting subject.

“ After this I beheld, and lo! a great
“ multitude, which no man could number,
“ of all nations, and kindreds, and people,
“ and tongues, stood before the throne and
“ before the Lamb, clothed with white
“ robes, and palms in their hands. They
“ are before the throne of God, and serve
“ him day and night in his temple; and he
“ that

“that sitteth on the throne shall dwell
“among them.”^m “Ye are come unto
“mount Sion, and unto the city of the
“living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and
“to an innumerable company of angels,
“to the general assembly and church of the
“first-born which are written in heaven,
“and to God the judge of all, and to the
“spirits of just men made perfect, and to
“Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.”ⁿ

If it be alleged that these passages do not absolutely express the mutual affection of the blessed, yet they certainly imply it; and even without admitting these as proofs, we shall still find as many as are necessary. St. Paul, in the epistle to the Ephesians, strongly expresses this spiritual union, by a

^m Rev. vii. 9. 15.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24.

metaphorical

metaphorical allusion to an edifice, firmly founded, and elegantly constructed. "Now
" therefore ye are no more strangers and
" foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the
" saints, and of the household of God; and
" are built upon the foundation of the
" apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ him-
" self being the chief corner stone; in whom
" all the building, fitly framed together,
" groweth into an holy temple in the Lord:
" in whom ye also are builded together
" for an habitation of God, through the
" spirit."^o In the epistle to the Colossians,
he says, "Above all put on charity, which
" is the bond of perfectness. And let the
" peace of God rule in your hearts, to the
" which also ye are called in one body."

^o Ephes. ii. 13, 22.^p Col. iii. 14, 15.

St. John says, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."¹ And St. Paul's admirable description of that charity which "never faileth,"² comprehends all the sentiments which I have particularized.

We may then conclude, that the social pleasures which we shall enjoy in heaven, will be uninterrupted and perfect; not producing that immoderate and impetuous joy which sometimes accompanies them here, and which is more frequently the effect of thoughtless levity, than the expression of real satisfaction; for true content is tranquil, and the most heartfelt pleasure serious; but our joy in heaven will be an eternal serenity,

¹ 1 John iv. 8, 16.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

animated by the most delightful transports. No tumult, no confusion, none of that turbulent mirth which exhausts the spirits of those who feel it, and embarrasses and wearies those who feel it not; but an universal tranquillity, a sweet satisfaction; a joy, lively, yet calm; pleasures sensible and animated, but pure, and always accompanied with that amiable circumspection which a tender friendship inspires; sentiments exquisite and inexpressible, yet mild and peaceable; sentiments which will impel us, not to introduce discord amidst the universal harmony of hearts, but to improve that harmony more and more, and to raise it to a degree of perfection, infinitely above the most enchanting image which the brightest imagination can trace. For we shall not “love in
“word, neither in tongue, but in deed and
“in

“ in truth.”^s “ We shall have fellowship
“ one with another, and our fellowship will
“ be with the Father, and with his son Jesus
“ Christ.”^t

^s 1 John iii. 18.

^t 1 John i. 3, 7.



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ON THE
HAPPINESS
OF THE
LIFE TO COME.

PART IV.

LET us now consider some of the celestial pleasures which we shall derive more immediately from our own reflections, and from some other circumstances which I have not yet had an opportunity of mentioning, and which will greatly add to our happiness in heaven.

Memory is a kind of restoration of the past: when we feel, or foresee as certain, effects

effects of a distant cause, which no longer exists, this gives in some measure a new existence to that cause, and places it again before us. When this relates to an action which we have performed, and which it was in our own power to have avoided, the idea or recollection of that action is a present source of pleasing or of painful sentiments, according to the consequences of that conduct which we recal to our remembrance. No situation can be more dreadful, than a state of misery towards which we have voluntarily directed our steps for a long time, and into which we have at length plunged ourselves. Whatever may be the torment which we endure, our greatest suffering consists in the reproaches of our conscience. And in the same manner, in a happy situation, at which we have arrived by attentions
and

and exertions full of circumspection, prudence, and assiduity, some of our most agreeable reflections arise from self-approbation. The more difficulties we have surmounted, and the more dangers we have avoided, the more perfectly we enjoy the happiness acquired.

Such is our sensibility to what is proper and reasonable, that, independently of the success of our actions, we feel pleasure or sorrow according to the conduct we have pursued. If we have done what ought naturally to bring upon us great misfortunes, as the loss of reputation, fortune, or health; and if, contrary to the common course of things, these misfortunes have not befallen us,—yet there still remains a severe punishment in our own breast; we are secretly ashamed of the esteem which the world expresses

presses for us, we cannot help inwardly confessing that we have not deserved it; our possessions appear to us to be in some measure unjustly acquired; our health a blessing which we ought not to enjoy: at least we certainly do not experience the comfort and satisfaction which we should feel without these humiliating reflections. And if, instead of losing any thing, though we deserved to be deprived of all, we have on the contrary obtained rewards which were due only to qualities of which we have been entirely destitute, or to efforts which we have not exerted, we then profit with regret from the ignorance of our superiors, who, by exalting us, have perhaps been guilty of injustice towards a more worthy object. That reward, however great it may be, can afford us only inconsiderable pleasure, in
comparison

comparison of what those who had deserved it would enjoy.

On the contrary, such is the power and influence of self-approbation, that it alleviates the greatest calamities. To be able to say with truth, "This is not my fault; "I have acted with all possible prudence to "avoid this misfortune; I have not departed from my integrity;" this disarms our sorrows of their sting, and almost converts them into comforts. So delightful is the pleasure of self-esteem and approbation, that when our misfortunes are the effects of our virtues, which sometimes happens amidst the disorders of the present world, then they change their nature, and cease to be evils. Are we poor? Perhaps it is because we have restored to the right owners, though not compelled to it by the law, that wealth

which

which our predecessors had gained by rapine and extortion; our poverty then becomes a treasure, of more value “than
 “thousands of gold and silver.”^x If in the cause of religion or virtue we should lose friends or reputation, yet, “if our heart
 “condemn us not, and we have confidence
 “towards God,”^y we may console ourselves for the loss of esteem and regard, with the soothing reflections arising from a good conscience; trusting that He to whom all hearts are open, will in a future world, when the mists of error shall be dispelled, bring forth our “righteousness as the light, and our
 “just dealing as the noon-day.”^z

With what pleasure shall we reflect in heaven upon the various temptations we

^x Psa. cxix. 72. ^y 1 John iii. 21. ^z Psa. xxxvii. 6.

shall have resisted, and the numerous evils we shall have endured, in pursuing with fortitude and perseverance the path tending towards that felicity, to which we shall at length have attained. Thus delightfully shall we enjoy the past, and, all evil having ceased, "God shall wipe away all tears "from our eyes."^a We shall possess, without any abatement, the fruit of our cares and exertions; and that approbation of our own conscience, which on earth had seldom been greater than to afford us consolation in our calamities, shall become in heaven a pure and sensible pleasure; a pleasure which reason will no longer oppose, nor humility condemn; for we are there no longer to "work out our own salvation with fear and "trembling,"^b but to obey the call of our

^a Rev. xxi. 4.

^b Phil. ii. 12.

glorified

glorified Master:—"Come, ye blessed of my
"Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for
"you, from the foundation of the world."

More imprest with the beauty of virtue than we were, or could be, here below, we shall not only rejoice in our self-approbation, with regard to the past, but we shall anticipate this celestial pleasure in an everlasting futurity; for we shall be assured of preserving it inviolate, and of augmenting it continually, through eternal ages. Upon earth, alas! we feel this pleasure but very imperfectly. One day distinguished by some great victory over our own heart, one day on which we can reflect with self-approbation, is a truly valuable day, and may almost be compared to those which we shall pass in heaven. But through our negli-

* Matth. xxv. 34.

gence and weakness, these days seldom arrive; and even when they do, our joy is abated by some melancholy recollection of the past, and by the fear which it occasions that the next day may resemble those numerous preceding ones, which have been stained with sin. We can, therefore, form but a faint idea of that transporting felicity which will proceed from the constant self-approbation which we shall enjoy in that illustrious assembly of saints, where our most ardent desire will be to advance "from glory to glory,"^a "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."^c

This boundless prospect of happiness will be enjoyed in perfect security. In our present state, the idea of our mortality, and of our subjection to corporeal pains, constantly

^a 2 Cor. iii. 18.^c Ephes. iv. 13.

accom-

accompanies us. We are sensible, every moment, that some accident may arrive the next, to deprive us of the fleeting breath of life; and that however happily we may escape from the dangers which hover continually around us, yet in a short space of time we must necessarily become a prey to decay and death. Our occupations, both of business and pleasure, frequently lead us into perils; while terror and anxiety diminish our enjoyments, and intrude into almost every circumstance of life.

In heaven we shall no longer be subject to the wars of elements, or to those more terrible revolutions which arise from the passions of mankind, and bring in their train miseries and destruction; miseries more formidable, and destruction more frequent, than are produced by infectious diseases, ferocious animals,

animals, overflowing seas, or contending storms.

“ Fate, arm’d with thunder, fire, and ev’ry plague,

“ That ruins, tortures, or distracts mankind,

“ And makes the happy wretched in an hour,

“ O’erwhelms you not with woes so terrible

“ As your own wrath.”^f

The present state of things renders it impossible, even with the greatest care, to avoid misfortunes; and mankind are in general so indiscreet and inconsiderate, as not to reflect what evil their conduct may bring upon others. Is it surprising then, that, even without enmity, we are continually crossing and clashing with each other, and that our negligence occasions various evils, which a small degree of prudence would have prevented?

^f Armstrong.

“ Without

“ Without misfortune, what calamities!
“ And what hostilities, without a foe!
“ Nor are foes wanting to the best on earth.
“ But endless is the list of human ills,
“ And fights might sooner fail, than cause to fight.”^a

But even in this life misfortunes would be much less frequent, if mankind were united by that bond of mutual affection, which our Saviour earnestly recommends to his disciples as their peculiar distinction. “ By this shall all men know that ye are
“ my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”^b Such misfortunes cannot therefore have place in an abode where the tumults both of the natural and moral world will subdue into peace, and we shall “ love
“ our neighbour as ourselves.”^c

^a Dr. Young.

^b John xiii. 35.

^c Matth. xxii. 29.

We cannot, perhaps, in this life, form an adequate idea of the pleasure arising from perfect security. It is impossible to enjoy such a state on earth, and therefore we cannot acquire a just idea of the satisfaction and joy which must accompany the assurance of an absolute exemption from all danger. We are so far from being able to acquire perfect tranquillity in this world, that, on the contrary, the moment we reflect on that which we do experience, it appears so ill-founded, that we immediately lose it, and can recover it only by ceasing to reflect. I am in health to-day, but am I certain that I shall be so to-morrow? The friend whose society is now so delightful to me, in a few days perhaps may be snatched from me by death. In short, if we were to meditate on all the probable dangers which threaten us every

L^d

moment.

moment, upon what basis should we found our tranquillity? It is true, that many persons live without fear, even when they are threatened with various misfortunes; they are inattentive to the dangers which surround them, and this is frequently a real advantage; an advantage, which, if we did not all possess in some degree, our mortal life would be a state of constant suffering; and it is probably for this reason, that the Creator has concealed futurity from our view.

But the most fearless do not, neither can they, enjoy that rational tranquillity which proceeds from the conviction of being in a state of security which nothing can alter; because such a state is inconsistent with this life.

It is only by looking forward with confidence to a perfect and eternal state, that we
can

can acquire real tranquillity here below. Notwithstanding our natural repugnance to pain, and every kind of adversity, such is the force of religion, that by her powerful influence, we may conquer that repugnance, whenever it would interfere with our duty; and we shall not only prove our religious courage when we are called forth to active exertions, but we shall possess the more difficult virtue of passive fortitude, which will induce us to submit with patience and resignation to every apparent misfortune, and even to rejoice in it. Then only can we enjoy a tranquillity in some measure resembling the felicity of heaven, when "casting all "our care" upon Providence, in the full assurance that "He careth for us,"^k we build our confidence on this incontestable

^k 1 Pet. v. 7.

principle,

principle, that whenever God permits misfortunes to befall a virtuous man, it is only as the means of increasing his future happiness; because that, according to the admirable arrangements of his wisdom and goodness, "all things shall work together for good to them that love God."¹

In heaven, where pain and sorrow shall be no more, and "death shall be swallowed up in victory,"^m we shall feel a sweet security that every danger is past, and that we shall enjoy for ever those pleasures which are at the right hand of God: treasures immortal and immutable, "eternal in the heavens, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."ⁿ

¹ Rom. viii. 28.^m 1 Cor. xv. 54.ⁿ Matth. vi. 20.

This perfect security is so necessary to our felicity, that without it the greatest blessings would become in some measure the source of misery; and even the more deserving they were of our attachment, the more afflictive would be the evil resulting from the possible privation of them.

In the world to come our desires will not exceed their proper limits; and the assurance that they shall be gratified will render them agreeable sentiments, without any mixture of impatience. That which renders them painful is the fear of disappointment, which always accompanies them here, and which produces a degree of impatience; but if we could eradicate this fear, obtain an entire command over ourselves, and consider seventy years as an almost imperceptible portion of our duration, impatience then would
cease;

cease; and such will be our situation when we shall arrive in the mansions of immortality.

There our desires, being always bounded by reason and virtue, will be always gratified: our love of pleasure will never be at variance with our sense of duty. Without doubt one of our principal employments will be, to inform and improve ourselves more and more, and to embrace every opportunity of informing, improving, and rendering more happy, those of our *fellow-citizens in the household of God*, who may not have made so great a progress as ourselves, or to whom we can be in any degree useful. We shall joyfully sacrifice our own particular gratifications to our social and generous sentiments, whenever circumstances require such a sacrifice; and this will greatly
heighten

heighten the pleasure which we shall derive from our noble and exalted sentiments.

Labour will be no longer necessary to procure us conveniencies and comforts. We shall neither *toil nor spin*: for we shall dwell in “a city whose builder and maker is “God;”^o we shall be clothed in that fine “linen which is the righteousness of saints;”^p and we shall eat of those “fruits,” and drink of “that water of life,” which shall be “in the midst of the new Jerusalem.” Our occupations will therefore only be calculated to promote our felicity; but an attempt to particularize them would be absurd, since we are not sufficiently acquainted with the nature of our celestial sensations, the degree of our faculties, or the species of objects which we shall meet with in heaven.

^o Heb. xi. 10.^p Rev. xix. 8.

There

There are in nature innumerable mysteries which are impenetrable to mortal eyes, an infinity of wonderful connexions which our weak understandings cannot trace: we shall then perhaps penetrate those mysteries, and comprehend those connexions.

We may frequently employ ourselves in contemplating the glories of our heavenly abode: which will doubtless afford an everlasting subject for admiration. St. John has given us, in the Revelations, a sublime idea of the magnificence of that habitation, which will be, as he expresses it, “ the tabernacle
“ of God with men. The building of the
“ wall of it was of jasper, and the city was
“ pure gold, like unto clear glass; and the
“ foundations of the wall of the city were
“ garnished with all manner of precious
“ stones. And the kings of the earth do
“ bring

“bring their glory and honour into it.
 “There shall be no night there; and they
 “shall bring the glory and honour of the
 “nations into it.” This figurative description conveys to us, by metaphors adapted to our present conceptions, the most lofty ideas of the grandeur of that *holy city*, which shall be filled with *the glory of God*.

The noblest and most delightful of all our occupations will be, to praise and adore that gracious Being, who is the author and giver of every blessing. The angels and saints in heaven are represented to us as continually worshipping God, and ascribing unto Him “glory, and honour, and power.” To some this perpetual adoration may appear wearisome; but how little do they under-

† Rev. xxi. 3, 18, &c.

• Rev. iv. 8.

stand those exquisite sentiments which arise from a continual meditation upon the felicity we enjoy, and an uninterrupted contemplation of that divine Benefactor from whom alone it proceeds. What transports of gratitude and love will fill our hearts, when we shall behold Him, who, having guided us with his "counsel" through the paths of time, has afterwards received us "to glory" in the mansions of eternity: having given us, "who were dead in trespasses and sins," his only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

I shall not enlarge further on the nature of our celestial felicity, but conclude with a few general observations.

[†] Psa. lxxiii. 24.

^{*} Ephes. ii. 1.

There are enjoyments in the present life, which are calculated to gratify in a high degree the desires of a rational mind: for example; the social pleasures of friendship and charity, and those which arise from solitude and retirement; interesting and improving conversation, or serious and sublime meditation; whilst nature appears in her loveliest aspect, all around is serenity and beauty, and all within tranquillity and peace. Could these scenes be supposed secure and permanent, we might look forward with satisfaction to the eternal duration of this world; and, if we had no idea of a better, we might consider such a state as a paradise; but after a few ages should have passed away, the immortal soul, wearied by continual repetition, would become animated by new desires, which could only find their full gratification

tification in those celestial regions, where the least of our pleasures will surpass the most interesting earthly joy; where tranquillity will be accompanied with an endless progress, and the assurance of success in our studies; where we may expect varied and increasing enjoyments; and where consequently, eternity, far from introducing disgust and languor, will add to our glory and felicity a more ample and more exquisite delight.

The ancient heathen writers, and particularly the poets, have left us descriptions of their Elysian fields, and of the golden age. In the latter, simplicity of manners, innocence, peace, freedom from fatiguing occupations, a soil naturally fertile, and seasons mild and serene, constitute the greatest charms of the description. In the Elysian fields,

fields, the same images heightened and improved, an exemption from the humiliating necessities of our mortal state, some pleasures adapted to our nature, represent to us another golden age, but in some measure refined. These fictions, though extremely defective, interest the most insensible hearts. If we purify them from the mean, the gross, and the imperfect, which must necessarily accompany the description of objects, too nearly resembling those with which we are acquainted upon earth; and if we add to them various advantages which the heathens either could not imagine, or could not represent in all their extent and lustre, for want of ideas, sufficiently sublime, of the Divinity and his designs,—these descriptions may perhaps be regarded as faint sketches of the celestial felicity in its commencement.

What

What the holy scripture tells us concerning the garden of Eden, and the state in which we suppose mankind would have been, if neither our first parents, nor their posterity, had sinned, presents a very engaging image; yet this cannot give an adequate idea of our future paradise:

————— “Far happier place
“Than this of Eden, and far happier days.”⁷

Man here below, even in a state of innocence, and with the approbation of the Most High, could be only in the infancy of his dignity and happiness. Man, though innocent, would still be but man; the earth would be but a garden; though we should not be subject to death, we could not in this world enjoy immortality to that degree of which our nature would be capable. To

⁷ Milton.

confine

confine immortals here below, would not be consistent with that unbounded love which the Almighty testifies towards his creatures: to enjoy a glorious and blissful immortality, we must have been transported to some superior abode, or our present habitation must have been considerably improved, in order to be suitable to the purified nature of its inhabitants, when they were become equal unto the angels.

But the pleasures of our celestial paradise will not consist in a limited felicity, a small portion of joy, particles of happiness, (if I may be allowed the expression) of which we might form almost an adequate idea; but in an unbounded joy, surrounding us on every side; in a vast, an immense felicity, arising from pleasures innumerable and unlimited; in the eternal emanations of the
power

power and goodness of the infinite Author of all, and in the “unsearchable riches of “Christ;”^z our dwelling will be with God in boundless realms of bliss, and our society, with innumerable multitudes of intelligent beings, continually advancing, as well as ourselves, in wisdom, glory, and happiness.

With such hopes, and such prospects, we may not only “run with patience the race “which is set before us,”^a but we may “go “on our way rejoicing:^b looking unto “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; “who, for the joy that was set before him, “endured the cross, despising the shame, and “is set down at the right hand of the throne “of God.”^c “Angels, principalities, and “powers, being made subject unto him.”

^z Ephes. iii. 8. ^a Heb. xii. 1. ^b Acts viii. 39. ^c Heb. xii. 2.

ON THE
HAPPINESS

OF THE
LIFE TO COME.

CONCLUSION.

TO render this Essay more complete, I shall collect, into one point of view, the principal objects of that glorious prospect which eternity opens before us, as a recapitulation and fummary of my preceding observations and reflections; and if any of them have in the smallest degree engaged the attention of the reader, when only separately considered, I hope, that when thus united,

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and

and reflecting on each other a more glorious lustre, they will produce a greater effect, and make a more forcible and more lasting impression.

In heaven, our glorified bodies will be no longer subject to infirmity or decay: all positive evil will cease. Our faculties, being perfected to a degree of which we can at present form no idea, will convey to the soul an endless variety of delightful emotions. In the enjoyment of eternal youth and health, at endued perhaps with modes of perception present as incomprehensible to us as are the pleasures of vision to a man born blind, our senses will no longer be at variance with our reason: the corruptible body will no more press down the soul, but will be the instrument of its happiness. We shall enjoy the pleasure of acquiring and possessing knowledge,

knowledge, unallayed by any of those inconveniences which accompany them on earth. Our faculties, talents, and assistances, will always be equal to the studies in which we shall employ them: a firm confidence of success in our enquiries and researches will make them so easy to us, that they will be productive of pleasure, unmixed with the slightest degree of fatigue; and being secure of an eternal duration, we shall not fear any impediment to our advancement in those sublime attainments, which will be the objects of our pursuit in the realms of immortality.

The Supreme Being will always be the principal object of our meditations. Here we see him but *darkly*; there we shall behold him *face to face*. The attributes of God, the wonders of creation, the conduct
of

of Providence, the great designs of the Most High, and all those beautiful, sublime, and infinitely diversified objects, in the contemplation of which we feel every moment the weakness of our earthly faculties, will be displayed before us in all their lustre.

At the sight of that immense store of pleasures, of which God will have given us possession, our boundless admiration will be accompanied with the sweetest emotions of gratitude and love. By the recollection of the past, those evils, which can exist no longer but in our memory, will be admirably instrumental in enhancing the value of our happiness, and procuring us a more exquisite enjoyment of it. During this delightful retrospect, we shall look up to that Being, who is *the author and finisher of our faith*, with transports of gratitude and love, of which

which our most ardent sensations of piety on earth can give us but a faint idea.

From reflecting on the past, we shall naturally proceed to meditate on the future, and to enjoy the delightful anticipation of those degrees of glory and felicity which we shall not at first possess. Admitted into the presence of God, honoured by his approbation, we shall see in Him, and in every thing around us, the great system of universal felicity: a felicity for ever extending, and for ever increasing. God, who knows our hearts, will place objects before us to exercise our noblest virtues, in all their variety, delicacy, and ardour. Happy in ourselves, and in the felicity of myriads of our fellow-creatures, exulting in the prospect of an eternal augmentation of excellence and happiness, we shall enjoy these inestimable blessings

blessings with a warmth and energy of sentiment, which it is impossible to feel in this imperfect state.

We shall be secure of finding, in each of the blessed, every disposition and affection towards us which can gratify our social feelings, and our natural desire to love and to be beloved. Strengthened by our progress in knowledge, in virtue, and in amiable sentiments; animated by the presence of our heavenly Father; free from all impediments; secure from all indifference; our affection for each individual of the blessed will be more ardent and tender than that which we now feel for the most beloved friend: while we have the greatest reason to hope, that every tender and virtuous attachment formed on earth, if the object of it be really deserving of our esteem, will be renewed with
augmented

augmented ardour, and be enjoyed for ever. No envy, no jealousy, can ever disturb our social happiness. Every one will be contented with his own lot, every one will sincerely rejoice in the superior exaltation of others; and thus we shall in some measure appropriate to ourselves all the happiness of heaven. At the first sight of a glorified spirit, we shall feel a reciprocal attachment; and shall for ever rejoice in the blessings of mutual love.

When we shall reflect on the numerous temptations we have overcome, and the various afflictions we have endured, in our progress towards that felicity to which we have at length attained, we shall enjoy the approbation of our own conscience; and that approbation, which on earth had seldom been more than a consolation in adversity, will

will become in heaven a pure and delightful pleasure;—a pleasure which we shall anticipate in an everlasting futurity; for we shall be secure of preserving it inviolate, and of augmenting it continually, by the constant exercise of virtue.

All these blessings will be accompanied with the certainty that they are ours for ever. In heaven, where pain and sorrow shall be no more, and death shall be swallowed up in victory, we shall feel a sweet security that every danger is past: while futurity presents an endless perspective, a boundless field for the exercise of the noblest virtues, and the enjoyment of constantly increasing happiness.

Such are my ideas of the blessings of a future state. I flatter myself that I have not offered, under the sanction of the gospel, any

any propositions which are not either absolutely asserted, or clearly implied, in the sacred writings; and with regard to my conjectures, I have carefully endeavoured to hazard such only as, founded on the attributes of God, on the nature of things in general, and on the constitution and situation of the human race in particular, appear to be extremely probable. If I am mistaken in any of these ideas, yet I cannot err in recommending the encouragement of those sentiments which they tend to excite, and the practice of those duties which they are calculated to enforce.

Our life in this world is only a preparation for the next; a state of trial, and of discipline; in which we ought, not only to avoid as much as possible every action which is displeasing to God, but also to acquire
virtuous

virtuous habits, and a taste for every thing which is rational, amiable, and worthy of a being who aspires to become hereafter *equal unto the angels*. By this principle we may try the value of all our pursuits, of all our pleasures. If our intellectual and moral improvements in this world tend to the perfecting our felicity in that which is to come, it necessarily follows, that our most important business is to enlighten our understanding, and to improve our heart; which may be as effectually accomplished by the active member of society, as by the sedentary recluse. Religion does not oblige us to renounce the common occupations, or the innocent pleasures of life. A proper attention to the former is often a great and important duty; and the latter are the flowers which Providence has scattered in the narrow,

narrow, and often thorny path of virtue. But let not the cares of this life engage our whole attention; let not pleasure be considered as our business. In a state which I have already called the infancy of our existence, our heavenly Father acts like a kind and tender parent; indulging us in every pleasure which is not contrary to our more important interests, but leading us to pursue such as will form our minds to happiness and virtue.

The father, who consults the real good of his child, will cultivate his taste, his understanding, his virtuous affections, at the moment when he appears only solicitous to amuse him. The sports of infancy must not be cruel; they must not be such as feed the selfish passions, and counteract the great ends of education. Instruction may be united
with

with pleasure, and reason may gain strength while fancy is amused. The tender guardian will never lose sight of the permanent advantage of his pupil; the child must remember that he is born to be a man.

Such is our situation on earth; and the comparison may give us a faint idea of the gracious designs of our heavenly Father. Since the bountiful hand of Providence has bestowed on us innumerable blessings, and placed us in the midst of objects calculated to gratify our various tastes and inclinations, as far as is consistent with those great designs which regard our eternal felicity, we cannot surely render ourselves unacceptable to Him, when we enjoy with gratitude the gifts he has vouchsafed to offer us, or exult in the pleasing consequences of those virtues, which, by his grace, we have been enabled to perform

form. Let the rich and prosperous rejoice in the blessings which God has given them; the wealth which is spent in relieving distress, in encouraging science and virtue, or in promoting the innocent pleasures of society, and affording to a fellow-creature one agreeable hour, will not be lost. Whenever we contribute to the happiness of others, we cultivate sentiments which to all eternity will form a part of our own. Let philosophy extend its researches, let genius indulge the enthusiasm of a warm imagination; all that is beautiful, all that is sublime, in the productions of art, or the works of nature, all contribute to raise the mind to Him from whom they immediately or ultimately proceed, and to fix the attention on those more glorious scenes, where alone real perfection can be found.

And

And ye, whose hearts are formed to feel the sweet emotions of friendship and benevolence, to you I address myself with peculiar satisfaction. Let not the cold maxims of unfeeling scepticism check your enjoyment of pleasures in which angels share. The example, the positive command, of the great Author of our salvation, calls us to love one another. "The charities of father, son, and "brother,"^d the tender ties of friendship, the warm philanthropy, "which scarce collective man can fill,"^e all are the glorious fruits of that religion of which the distinguishing characteristic is charity. Fear not the sorrows which, in this state of trial, will be blended with the highest transports which the human mind is capable of feeling. The object of your tenderest attachment may be

^d Milton.^e Vanity of Human Wishes.

doomed

doomed to suffer, may be removed from you by death; even the Saviour of the world wept for his Lazarus, and all his disciples must be ready to resign every blessing they enjoy, when they are called to take up the cross and follow him. But these light afflictions are but for a moment: the friends who are parted on earth will again unite in heaven to part no more: the gentle heart, which now bleeds at the sight of human miseries, will there enjoy for ever the enchanting spectacle of universal happiness.

These are pleasures which reason does not blush to own, and which religion does not forbid us to enjoy: and shall we exchange these pleasures for follies which disgrace our understanding, and vices which corrupt our heart; which afford no real satisfaction in possession, and which must soon perish for ever?

ever? In a few years the delusive objects of vanity, avarice, and ambition, will lose their deceitful splendor; and all the glittering treasures, which are so often purchased at the expence of honour and virtue, will appear as contemptible to the poor wretch who now pursues them, as the toys which amused his infancy.

————— “Thrones will then be toys,

“And earth and skies seem dust upon the scale.”^f

The Christian, whose faith is fixed upon the happiness of a future state, is prepared and enabled to support, with unshaken constancy, and entire resignation to the will of God, the evils of the present life. The heaviest appear to him insignificant; the most lingering, but transient. Far from obstructing his progress towards the heavenly

^f Dr. Young.

Canaan, they will advance and accelerate it. He submits, with religious patience and pious fortitude, to the deprivation of worldly comforts, while he trusts that he shall receive a recompence for them in the realms of perfect happiness. To arrive in those regions of felicity, is the principal, is almost the sole object of his desires. One step in the way which leads to heaven, is productive of far greater advantages than a thousand directed only towards the acquisitions and pleasures of this world. Those "treasures" which are "laid up in heaven," are the only "true riches." To connect religion with every circumstance in life, to make it the companion of our gayest as well as our gravest hours, is to pursue the path which will conduct us to real and permanent

* Luke xvi. 11.

felicity: it is to secure a present satisfaction, preferable to every other enjoyment our mortal state can afford. The least important, as well as the most material blessings proceed equally from God, and require our grateful acknowledgments; and we cannot truly enjoy any pleasure which we do not sincerely believe to be authorised by Him “who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”¹

The pursuit in which we cannot ask his protection must be criminal; the pleasure for which we dare not thank Him cannot be innocent. This habitual piety appears to be the proper offering of a Christian; who ought to be always employed in the service of God; and who fulfils his will, as much when he enjoys with gratitude the blessings he has given, as when he supports with for-

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 17.

titude

itude the trials which are sent by the same all-gracious hand.

We are too apt to yield to indolence in virtue, and to negligence in piety; which may be productive of the most fatal consequences. They are the most common, and at the same time the most dangerous, spiritual diseases of the sincere Christian. They insensibly lay the soul asleep, and that sleep threatens us with death. The most religious man requires frequent admonitions and precautions against those enemies of his soul. On this account St. Peter thus addresses himself to his fellow-christians: "I will not
" be negligent to put you always in remem-
" brance of these things, though ye know
" them, and be established in the truth.
" Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in
" this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting
" you

“you in remembrance. Moreover, I will
“endeavour that ye may be able, after my
“decease, to have these things always in
“remembrance.”^k

Let us then exert ourselves with courage,
with ardour, and an uninterrupted perseve-
rance, to acquire all the glory, all the felicity,
of which we can be susceptible in the life to
come: “forgetting those things that are be-
“hind, and reaching forth unto those things
“which are before,” let us “press towards
“the mark, for the prize of the high calling
“of God in Christ Jesus.”^l Let us not
“faint; but, though our outward man
“perish,” let us pray that “the inward man
“may be renewed day by day.” Then
“our light affliction, which is but for a

^k 2 Pet. i. 12, 13, 15.

^l Phil. iii. 14, 15.

“moment,”

“moment,” shall work out “for us a far
“more exceeding and eternal weight of
“glory: while we look not at the things
“which are seen, but at the things which
“are not seen; for the things which are
“seen, are temporal, but the things which
“are not seen, are eternal.”^m

^m 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17, 18.



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